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Vol. II.

\$2.50
a Year.

Published Weekly by Beadle and Adams,
No. 98 WILLIAM ST., NEW YORK.

Price,
Five Cents.

No. 24.



THE DUMB SPY.

BY OLL COOMES,
AUTHOR OF "ANTELOPE ABE,"
"KEEN-KNIFE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE CLAIM-STAKERS.

THERE were thirteen of them—all men in the prime of life, strong, robust and hardy-looking fellows, with rough, bearded and sunburnt faces, and

eyes that shone with an honest light and the spirit of adventure. All but two were dressed in suits of brown jeans, which was, in a great measure, indicative of their nativity. The two exceptions were habited in the rude buckskin garments so common to the hunter and trapper of the Northwest.

Those in the homespun were a party of Kentuckians who had come from their southern homes, to select "claims" in the new territory, preparatory to "entering" them when the Indians' title to the land expired. Those in buckskin were hunters in the employ of the claim-stakers, as guides and scouts.

It was a summer night in the year 1842. A camp-fire was burning in a dense forest bordering a large creek, in the southwest part of the then territory of Iowa, and within its light the little band of claim-stakers reclined in attitudes of ease and repose, chatting, smoking and listening to their guides "spin yarns" of their adventures upon the border.

A number of fine-looking rifles reclined against the trunks of surrounding trees, while at one side lay a flag-pole, surveyor's compass and chain.

They were encamped upon a tract of land known as the Black-Hawk Reserve, belonging to the Sacs and Fox Indians. But in less than one year from that time, the title of the latter would expire, and the reserve be thrown open to the white man.

Captain John Ross-grove, the leader of the claim-stakers, had, long before, conceived the idea of planting a colony in the new territory of Iowa, and having selected from his list of acquaintances such men as he knew would stand by him in times of danger and adversity, they struck out for the country of the upper Des Moines. The Black-Hawk Reserve attracted their attention, and having readily perceived its great natural advantages, they at once selected it as the land of their future home, and proceeded to locate and stake off claims, ready for pre-emption as soon as the Indians' title expired.

They had been in the territory several days when we introduce them to the reader; and although their proceedings were in violation of the Government treaty with the celebrated chief, Black Hawk, they had obtained from the latter a private permit to select lands on certain conditions, which they endeavored to observe very strictly. But, despite all this care and precaution, they little dreamed of the dangers gathering around them.

Captain Ross-grove, the leader of the party, was about twenty-five years of age. He was a man of fine accomplishments, brave and handsome. A few days prior to his departure from home, he had wedded one of the fairest daughters of the land, and it was with a joyous heart he received the fond parting kiss of his young bride, and struck out to find them a home in the great West. And thoughts of his wife—of her waiting and watching for his return—proved a keen spur to all acts and movements.

Nat Taylor, or Noisy Nat, as he was usually called on account of his inborn jocularities, was the eldest of the two hunters, being about five-and-forty years of age.

Wild Dick, as the other guide was called, was not over thirty years of age, and in form was small, but strong and wiry. He had attained the sobriquet of Wild Dick from the wild, startled expression always in his large blue eyes, and a nervous quickness in his movements not unlike that common to wild animals. Born and bred on the frontier, he had been schooled amid its wildest scenes and dangers; hence, he had imbibed much of the characteristic wildness of the woods and prairies.

As the hours wore away, the camp-fire became neglected in the all-absorbing stories of the two hunters, and at last the party found themselves in almost total darkness. However, it was replenished; and as its light reached out further and further into the gloom, it revealed to the eyes of the party an object hitherto unobserved.

"By snakes, it's a hornet's nest!" exclaimed Noisy Nat.

"So it is," replied Harry Dudley, the surveyor;

"hadn't it better be removed? Its inhabitants might disturb our repose."

"No, Mr. Surveyor," replied Nat, "if we'll let the hornets alone, they'll not pester us. I have a natural love for the little critters. Why, boys, you wouldn't b'lieve me if I war to tell ye that sich an insignificant thing as a nest o' hornets saved my skulp from a pack o' red-skins onc't."

"Humph! that's nothin'," ejaculated Wild Dick; "I saved a dozen or more lives onc't jist by crookin' my fingers a few times, and so I'll tell ye 'bout it. You see I had a brother—a twin-brother, too, and we looked so much alike that I could hardly tell which was t'other. Eyes, hair, forms and feat'ers war jist alike—"

"See here, Dick," interrupted old Nat, "if you war so much alike, how do you know which one you are?"

"I'll tell you how. My brother Seth was deaf and dumb, but he warn't no fool, I can tell you. He l'arnt the mutes' alphabet—that is, he l'arnt to talk with his fingers. I l'arnt too, and so we could talk with our fingers jist as fast as you and me can with our tongues, and that's sayin' a good deal. We war both livin' away up north, in a little shanty, and war engaged in huntin' and trappin'. One day I left Seth and went out into the woods to look arter a b'ar-trap, and what should I do but run into the clutches of about a hundred Ingins, on the war-path. They threatened to kill me, and scalp and play thunder in ginerol unless I'd guide them by the nearest known route to a certain fort which they wanted to destroy. You see they belonged a long ways to the south and wer'n't acquainted with the country. A thought struck me. I told 'em I'd show 'em the way if they'd let me go to my cabin fust. They refused, so I concluded to die rather than betray my friends at the fort. When the reds see'd I war in earnest they concluded to let me go to the cabin, but they war to go along, and threatened me with instant death if I spoke to any one at the cabin. I promised 'em I wouldn't, and then off we marched to the cabin. Brother Seth met us at the door. The Ingins paid no attention to him when they see'd he couldn't speak, for they supposed he war demented, and you all know how a red-skin regards a crazy person. My escort didn't understand finger-talk, so while I was busy 'bout the cabin, and gettin' my gun and knife and sich things, I kep' up an animated conversation with brother, and never once did the reds suspect what war up. I told him the pickle I war in, and what I had promised to do to save my life. So as soon as I had set off with the Ingins for the fort, Seth leant out, too. He took a roundabout way and beat my Ingins thar more'n two hours. Wal, to make a long story short, when them reds attacked the garrison, they got gloriously licked, and not one of the sojers got a scratch. And that's how I saved the fort and several men by crookin' my fingers a few times."

"That's pretty good, Dick," said Captain Ross-grove; "but where is your brother Seth now?"

"God only knows. I haven't seen him these five years, captain. The last I heard of him he war 'mong the Hudson Bay Fur men. He war a great pet of the 'rn, and the best trapper in the hull caboodle. I sw'ar, boys"—and a tear moistened the eye of the hunter—"I'd give a good deal to see that boy. I promised my ole dyin' mother I'd keep a watch on witless Seth, as he war always called, tho' he wer'n't witless by a long shot, I can tell ye. Poor Seth! Jist as soon as I git through with you fellers I'm goin' to see 'bout him, if Scarlet Death don't put a pink spot on my temple."

"Then you really believe that there is such a creature as Scarlet Death, the Demon of the Des Moines?"

"B'lieve it? Why, Cap, I know it! Havn't I see'd lots of his victims, and his hoof-prints on the earth?"

"Then he is cloven-footed, eh?"

"Yes, makes a track like an ox; but thar's only two tracks, else I'd think an ox, or suthin' of the

kind made the tracks. Ugh! It makes the chills creep over me."

"And why is the monster called Scarlet Death?"

"Because a small, round scarlet spot on the temple, just afore the ear, is the only mark he leaves upon a victim. He never breaks the skin or draws blood, but seems to strike with the deadly swiftness of the lightning's flash. What he strikes *with*, no one knows, but I do know—"

Further speech was here interrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps. The next instant a stranger made his appearance within the radius of light. He was a tall, villainous-looking fellow, with black, snaky eyes, a low, sullen brow, and rough, sensual face. He was dressed in the garb of an Indian, and the unceremonious manner in which he stalked into camp, convinced our friends that he was there with no friendly intentions.

"Good-evening, stranger," said Captain Ross-grove in his free, cordial manner, rising to his feet.

"Well, good-evenin'," returned the stranger; "but then, you needn't stare a fellow out of countenance. I'm sure I'm not sich an object of curiosity."

"Hope you'll excuse our want of manners," said Ross-grove, in a tone slightly tainted with sarcasm, "but whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"M. Jules Devreaux. I am business agent of the Sacs and Fox Indians, and hold my appointment from the United States Government."

"Indeed! Glad to meet you, M. Jules Devreaux."

"Perhaps, when you learn my business here, you will have reason to change your mind. I presume you are aware of your being trespassers on the Black-Hawk Reserve?"

"I know no such thing," replied Ross-grove; "we are here by permit."

"By permit of whom?"

"One that has authority," replied the captain; "and we are taking no liberties that will conflict with the conditions of that permit."

"But they will with the treaty of your Government. This land belongs to the Sacs and Fox Indians, and for days have you been chaining it and setting up landmarks without the permission of the rightful owners. It's quite a year yet until the Indians' title to these lands expires, and when it does, *we* propose to *renew our claim*. Therefore, be-gone at once!"

"Your insolence, sir," said Ross-grove, growing somewhat indignant at the man's insulting language, "is equal to your want of good sense, and—"

"That expresses it, Cap," chimed in Noisy Nat.

"If you wish to transact any business with us," continued Ross-grove, "you will do so in language becoming a man, or leave our camp at once."

A low, defiant laugh escaped the villain's lips.

"Impudent, sir, you are," he said to Ross-grove. "Your hair may ornament an Indian's lodge before morning, if your courage is equal to your display of impudence. Just think of it, gentlemen—just think of it; one blast on that"—producing a small silver whistle—"would bring a hundred Indians down upon you in a minute."

"The nation, you say!" exclaimed Noisy Nat. "Then, jist for the Lord's sake, give us a blast, and let 'em come, licky-t'-scoot. I'm decomposin' fur a fight with the red-skins. Yas, whistle 'em in, Mr. Devilrow, or gimme the tool, ye p'izen sap-head! I'll blow it till she bu'sts."

"Never mind, Rattle-tongue, you may be glad to swallow your words before daylight," said M. Jules. Then, turning to Ross-grove, he continued; "Now, sir, I desire to know whether you intend to leave this reserve or not?"

"Yes, when we get ready," was the reply.

"That's the talk, Cap," added Wild Dick, and his words were repeated by every man.

"Then your blood be upon your own heads," said the villain, lifting the whistle to his lips. But the blast that was intended to call the savages was never given, for at this instant a low cry escaped

Devreaux's lips, and he sunk a quivering mass to the ground, *stricken down by an unseen hand!*

A cry of surprise burst from the claim-stakers' lips. They were completely dumfounded, and gazed with distended eyes upon the prostrate form of the man. Not one of their party had raised a hand against him, and yet he had been stricken down.

Noisy Nat advanced and bent over the prostrate form.

"Ay, boys!" he exclaimed in a husky tone; "I see now what done the work. Look thar!"

He turned the body over, exposing the left side of the face to the light. Just before the ear all eyes saw a deep scarlet dent in the temple. The skin was not broken, nor was a drop of blood visible. But M. Jules Devreaux was stone-dead!

"By St. Peter!" exclaimed Wild Dick, "I understand it now. Scarlet Death, the Demon, has spotted the villain!"

"Yes, boys," added old Nat, "Scarlet Death is erbout, and God only knows which o' us will git a spot next."

The claim-stakers shuddered. The hunter's stories of this unknown destroyer had been confirmed by startling, horrifying proof; and in less than ten minutes more they were moving down the creek, in search of more congenial quarters.

CHAPTER II.

THE "DISPUTE."

A FEW miles south of the scene of the events just narrated was a strip of country included in and forming a part of the territory of Iowa, which the State of Missouri claimed as being embraced within the boundaries defined by her constitution, while the territory, to which it rightfully belonged, disputed their authority. From these conflicts, this strip of country became known as the "Dispute."

Owing to its natural advantages and remoteness from seats of justice, the Dispute had become one of the most central posts for outlaws, river pirates and robbers west of the Mississippi.

It is true there were a few honest "squatters" on the Dispute, but, being in the minority, they were compelled to live up to the "Club Laws," a series of enactments of the "Disputers" for the government of their settlement.

It was with deep regret that these robbers and outlaws looked forward to the day when the title of the Indians to the land north of them would expire. The savages had been very sociable neighbors, often lending a strong hand in their work of plunder and pillage. Then it had become so handy for the outlaws to attach all blame to the Indians, that it seemed totally impossible to carry on their work after the Indians had left; for white settlers, they knew, would flock in upon the reserve, and environ the Dispute, so that retreat to other quarters would be the only expedient. However, the Disputers, as they were called, had one present and fearful enemy to contend with. This was Scarlet Death, the Demon of the Des Moines.

On the afternoon of the same day on which our story opens, a number of the Dispute outlaws were congregated in a log-building in a little village called Spain.

They were a rough, villainous-looking set of men, of various nationalities, though the Americans and Indian half-breed predominated.

"Men," said one of the party, who seemed to be a leading spirit, "the subject before us is one of no little magnitude. In less than one year from now the Indians' title to the land north of us ends. Then settlers will flock in and crowd around us until it will not be safe for our business. But, we must not let them. We must stick to the Dispute, despite the vengeance of Scarlet Death or that thing called justice. The Demon we may manage to slay—"

"Yas, if he don't kill us," spoke in a comrade. "You see, Lieutenant Thoms, Scarlet Death has warped it to a dozen of our men a'ready."

"I know it, Fuller, I know it," replied Cale Thoms, the second in command of the outlaws; "but, if we'll use proper caution, we may destroy the Demon, be he man or devil. The settlers we can keep away."

"Then we must begin in time," said a low-browed German.

"That's it, Dalberg," said Thoms, "and if we intend to do this—keep the settlers off—we've work on hand this minute."

"The furies you say! What do you mean, lieutenant?"

"Just what I say. To be more explicit, there are about a dozen men a short ways north of here locating claims, and have been for three days. Captain John Rossgrove, of Columbus, Kentucky, is in command."

A cry of surprise burst from every lip, for John Rossgrove was well known to them, having visited the Dispute once, with a company of dragoons, in search of a band of horse-thieves that he had tracked in that direction.

"Then, by Jehosephat," said Thoms, "our captain, Reckless Ralph, will accomplish his mission, perhaps, without much trouble. As it's about time the captain was back, I wonder if we couldn't scare Rossgrove home? I believe I will send a note to him in the care of the Mute Spy, and try it. But, see here. Wouldn't it be best to send a man to the Indian village to stir up the red-skins, also, for fear the letter may fail in taking them away?"

The opinions of all in this matter coincided with that of Thoms.

"Then," said the latter, "I'll appoint Jules Devreaux for the work, and my instructions, Jules, are these: Don't be too stickling about telling the Indians an abundance of lies, as I know you can. Stir up their blood to a scalping heat, and get them out after the claim-locaters, if possible."

"I'll do *that*, lieutenant, bet your life on it," replied Devreaux, who at once departed on his mission.

A few minutes later, a man on horseback dashed up to the door of the cabin—dismounted and entered the apartment where the outlaws were congregated.

"Bill Hohn, as I live!" burst from the lips of several.

"You bet, boys," roared Hohn, excitedly.

"Why, Bill!" exclaimed Thoms, "what's up? Where's Reckless Ralph?"

"He and t'other boys 'll be in to-night."

"Is it possible?"

"It is, and he's got what he went after. But to his surprise he found another man had a claim on it, but took it anyhow. And what do you think? We come nigh runnin' right into that first owner's hands this mornin' up on the Purchase. To make a long story short, that owner is Captain John Rossgrove, the very chap that came here once with a company o' dragoons. For fear of bein' diskivered, 'ap is goin' to lay hid till night, and hesent me on in advance with this note for you, Lieutenant Thoms."

Thoms took the note and read it.

"Boys," he said, when he had concluded it, "the captain wants us to run those claim-stakers out of the country at once. He is afraid they'll get wind of what he has in his possession."

"He says the locaters have been chaining off claims along Chequest Creek to-day, and will probably camp in the vicinity of the old Indian ford to-night."

"By gar, it be one grand fun drivin' ze locaters off," exclaimed a little villainous Frenchman.

"Yes, but we'll have to be careful," said Thoms, "for fear the claim-locaters get wind of our movements. We will all go to our respective homes when we adjourn, then soon after dark, gather one by one on the north side of Beaver Lake. From that point we will shape our course, as I propose to send the Mute at once to the claim-stakers' camp, to ascertain their real force, and means of defense. Therefore I proclaim this meeting adjourned until dark."

The meeting broke up.

CHAPTER III.

WITLESS SETH.

SHORTLY after the claim-locaters broke camp the moon came up, and as they proceeded along the sandy shore of Chequest Creek toward the Des Moines, a cry from the lips of Noisy Nat brought them all to a stand.

"What now, Nat?" asked Captain Rossgrove.

"Look thar."

He pointed down at the sandy beach that lay sparkling before them in the bright moonlight. Every eye was at once bent in the direction indicated, and saw a long, slender hoof-mark deeply imprinted in the white, yielding sand.

"The Demon's tracks, by the holy mysteries!" exclaimed Wild Dick.

"And that is the track of Scarlet Death?" said Captain Rossgrove.

"Yes, Cap, that's the critter's track. Ugh! his very tracks make me shiver."

"This Demon is a creature I'd like to see," said young Dudley, the surveyor.

"Eh! and git a *pink* on yer temple?" asked Noisy Nat.

"No, I have no desire to meet the fate of M. Jules Devreaux. But, what kind of a weapon do you suppose he uses to strike with?"

"The devil only knows; however, I think he strikes with his breath like the blow-snake. But, boys, let's hoof it on down to the river and then go into camp again, Demon or no Demon."

Acting upon this suggestion, the party moved on and soon came to the Des Moines. Turning, they proceeded a short way down its course, when they again came to a halt for the night. Selecting a spot a few rods from the river, they went into camp.

It now became necessary to station a guard over the camp, and the responsibility of this duty first fell upon Wild Dick, who at once took his post in the woods a few rods west of camp.

The claim-locaters now threw themselves on their blankets before the fire, and engaged in conversation. A few minutes had thus passed when a figure glided suddenly into their midst with the silence of a shadow.

Every eye sought the face of the silent intruder, and every man would have sworn it was the face and form of Wild Dick, but for the peculiar garb he wore. And even this, they believed was a trick concocted by the hunter while alone upon guard; and so Captain Rossgrove said:

"Why, Dick, have you deserted your post? Where did you get your new suit?"

The intruder made no reply, further than to touch his ear and lips. But, this was sufficient. It told them he *was deaf and dumb*! This brought vividly to their minds the story that Wild Dick had told them of his brother, Witless Seth; and, although they had never seen the latter, they were satisfied he stood before them, for the family resemblance was remarkably striking.

"Call in Wild Dick," Rossgrove said to Noisy Nat, "for I am satisfied, from the great resemblance, that this man is his mute brother, Seth."

Noisy Nat at once relieved Wild Dick, who soon made his appearance in camp; and no sooner did his eyes meet those of the mute stranger than they lit up with a light of recognition, and the next moment the brothers greeted each other in an embrace that told of their great joy and brotherly love.

"Lordy, boys!" Wild Dick at length exclaimed, "this, captain and friends, is brother Seth, the identical twin-brother of whom I told you to-night. He's deaf and dumb, but he's no fool, I tell you."

Each of the claim-locaters advanced and shook the hand of the mute.

The brothers then entered into a conversation which was carried on, altogether with their fingers. It lasted for fully an hour. The claim-stakers were spectators, not auditors. At times they would see a smile of joy pass over Dick's face, then his brow

would grow moody and his eyes would flash with a vindictive fire; then again his features would relax into an expression of surprise and astonishment. Suddenly his pent-up emotions found expression in the startled exclamation:

"Good God, is it possible?—who'd 'a' thought—"

The words were uttered involuntarily, and having checked himself before he had fully expressed his emotions, he glanced quickly at Captain Rossgrove, then continued his conversation with his brother. At length, he turned to the captain and said:

"I swar, Cap, I've learnt a heap to-night. Brother Seth has told me some swissin' big secrets. A part of them, howsumever, I'm not at liberty to tell, just yet, and part of them I am. One of them is this: we're in imminent danger. Before mornin' we're to be attacked by a band of robbers. Seth says the settlers on the strip of country south of us, called the Dispute, is nothing but a nest of robbers, river-pirates, and counterfeiters."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Rossgrove. "A short time ago when I was through this country, with a company of soldiers, in search of a band of horse-thieves, we stopped at the Dispute, and for a frontier settlement, I considered it remarkably orderly."

"Ay, Cap, that was only an external show. Seth say's they're a hard set, and it's them that's sworn to kill every man of us afore mornin'. They're goin' to attack us just as soon as Seth goes back."

"Then your brother is one of them, eh?" said young Dudley.

"Wal, now, Harry, you've come to the stickin'-point. Seth lives at the Dispute, and is here as a spy, but he will prove to you that he is our friend."

"Well, really, this is surprising news, and will be likely to prove a detriment to our calculations. However, if Seth's story is true—and there is not a doubt but it is—the Dispute may be the rendezvous of the horse-thieves, river-pirates, and counterfeiters, that have so long baffled the most strenuous efforts of the officers of justice. If so, we might maneuver around and get a hold of the ringleaders, for whom there is a handsome reward offered."

"That's the right chorus, Cap," exclaimed old Nat. "I wouldn't mind turnin' an honest flip by raisin' the ha'r o' a hoss-thief."

"What does your brother propose doin', Dick?" questioned Rossgrove.

"Stay right here, and let me go back in his place. Won't I tell 'em some big 'uns, tho'!"

"They'll mistrust your intentions, and probably shoot you," said one of the party.

"Not much, Hayworth; I propose to pass myself off as Seth, the Mule."

"A capital idea, Dick," said the captain. "Were your mother living, I am sure she could not tell which was which, so far as forms and features are concerned; but your ignorance of the place and people would betray you."

"Not much, Molly Ann. I'd have Seth post me afore I left. The reason I'm so anxious to git among 'em is this yer; Seth says thar's sunthin' up 'mong the crew that he can't understand. You see he can't hear, and thar's only three in the clique that can talk the mute's language, and one of these is the captain of the crew, and another one his darter. And now, boys, I'm goin' to find out what the great move is 'mong them robbers and pirates."

"Well," said Rossgrove, "I admit I am anxious to know myself, but I do not want you, Dick, to place your life in jeopardy."

The brothers now entered into another conversation, which lasted full an hour; then they retired a short distance from camp and exchanged clothing, and Wild Dick became Witless Seth, the dumb spy. The claim-locaters felt certain his disguise would not be penetrated, unless it was through some inadvertence so peculiar to his reckless nature. In a few moments he took his departure for the Dispute, Witless Seth remaining with our friends.

The claim-stakers again threw themselves upon the ground in various positions of ease and repose.

All became silent and thoughtful, and at length all but the mute were wrapt in slumber.

Several minutes had passed thus, when Captain Rossgrove was aroused by a light touch on his arm.

Rising to a sitting posture, he saw the mute bending over him, holding a small bit of paper in his hand, which he at once placed in his.

Rossgrove unfolded the paper and saw it was written over in a good hand-writing. He held it to the light and read:

"John Rossgrove, your presence is required at home, 'less your affections in your young wife will be supplanted by the eminent Judge —"

"A FRIEND."

The paper dropped from the captain's hand. The color receded from his face, and he gasped hard for breath. Had a dagger been thrust to his heart, he could not have manifested more violent emotions.

"It's a lie!" he at length fairly hissed between his hard-set teeth; "it's an infamous lie. Oh, if this man could speak—could tell me from whence this letter came! But, then, all the powers on earth could not make me believe my wife, my darling Camilla, is false to me. No, no; this note is an imposition—perhaps a trick of some friend, for no truer heart ever throbbed in woman's breast than Camilla's."

Thus musing, he picked up the paper and put it in his pocket. Then he laid down again. But he could not sleep. Something like a horrible dream had engrossed his mind, with something terrible to come. What it was, of course he could not tell. He tried to shake off the spell, but in vain—it grew upon him. At length he arose to his feet, and drawing the blanket around him, walked out toward the river. He wanted to be moving—doing something that would drive that fearful fantasy from his mind.

On the bank of the river, under some drooping foliage, he stopped. The moonlit stream lay gleaming before him like a bed of molten silver, while along either shore hung a black fringe of shadows.

From a breast-pocket Captain Rossgrove drew a small picture-frame or case, which he opened and held where the moonbeams would show him the fair face set therein—the face of his young wife, Camilla.

"False, false!" he mused; "God in heaven forbid! Camilla, my darling wife, I know it is a falsehood, and why should I let the matter trouble me? One would think I suspected you, my angel Camilla; but never! Oh, if I could only look upon your living face this—"

He did not conclude the sentence, for just then a faint sound rushed suddenly athwart the night. It was the dip of oars. A boat was descending the river; it would pass before the captain. He bends his head and listens; the low murmur of voices comes to his ears, mingled with the plash, plash of oars. He can see the waves circling outward in advance of the descending boat, and at length he sees the craft glide within the partially-obscured range of vision.

He can count six men in the craft. Five are engaged at as many pair of oars, while the sixth one is supporting a burden on his arms and breast.

As the boat comes still nearer, the captain recognizes the man with the burden. It is Ralph Raft, the leading citizen of the Dispute, but Rossgrove little dreams that he is Reckless Ralph, the notorious outlaw chief.

Something drew the captain's attention to the burden Raft held in his arms. He saw it was a human form—the form of a woman. He could see her head resting on his breast, while her white, white face, upon which the moonbeams fell, was upturned to his dark, bearded visage.

"Ah," thought Rossgrove, "she is his wife or sweetheart. How fondly she gazes up into his face, and how tenderly he supports her! All is heaven to them now."

A strange fancy holds the captain's eyes upon the woman's face. The boat draws nearer. It is oppo-

site him. He starts and clutches at a limb for support. A groan escapes his lips—a groan that seems to come from a bleeding heart. But the sound is drowned in the splash of oars, and the long bateau glides on. Then he staggers, and falls to the earth.

He had recognized the face of that woman pillowed on the outlaw's breast. It was the face of his own wife—his own *Camilla Rossgrove*!

CHAPTER IV.

A GIANT'S HAND.

THE shock that Captain Rossgrove had received well-nigh drove him mad.

Staggering to his feet, he gazed like one bewildered, up and down the river. But nowhere was the bateau with his young wife to be seen. What he had seen, however, was sufficient evidence of the truthfulness of the note given him by the mute: *Camilla was false*!

"False! false!" he almost shrieked, in agony of heart. "Oh, impossible! There must be some fearful mystery, or wrong, about *Camilla's* appearance here in the arms of that man. I must solve the whole thing before I leave this country. If she is guilty—unfaithful, I will find it out without her knowledge of my purposes. I will say nothing of what I have seen to a living soul, but will try, by some pretext or other, to hold my friends in the country until I know, beyond a doubt, the cause of *Camilla's* presence here in this wild land."

He became silent and thoughtful. Finally he decided to follow on down the river, in hopes of gaining some clew to the mystery enshrouding his young wife's conduct.

He turned and moved rapidly down the stream, keeping within the dense shadows of the shore. Far ahead he could see the bright glimmer of the water in the moonlight, but nowhere upon its bosom could he see the object of pursuit. Still he followed on, scarcely aware of his vain efforts. A little moonlit glade suddenly appeared before him. On its margin he came to a sudden halt, just within the border of some dense shrubbery. He had caught sight of a man standing on the opposite side of the opening, his head bent in the attitude of intense listening. A single glance told Rossgrove that he was an Indian warrior; and he at once realized a sense of danger when he saw that the savage was in war-paint.

The captain's first thought was of returning to camp and warning his friends; but before he had turned his eyes from the glade, his attention was arrested by seeing a white man enter the glade and move toward the savage. From their movements it was evident they were there by appointment.

They talked for several minutes, the gestures of the white man indicating great excitement; then the Indian turned and glided away into the woods.

The white man still remained in the glade, and from the attitude which he assumed, it was evident he intended to await the Indian's return.

Rossgrove kept his eye upon the man, and scarcely ten minutes had elapsed when he suddenly saw him stagger as if under a violent blow, and then as a low wail rung tremulously out on the still summer air, he sunk to the earth, where he lay beating the ground with his arms in apparent death-throes.

The captain was startled by this sudden and tragical scene. His mind reverted to the silent and mysterious death of *M. Jules Devreaux*, and he felt satisfied the silent slayer, *Scarlet Death*, had dealt this second blow. But the apparent agony of the prostrate man caused every noble and Christian impulse of Rossgrove's heart to supersede all fears of personal danger; and, regardless of the consequences, he plunged from the thicket into the moonlit glade, and hastily approached the fallen man.

The struggling of the latter had ceased ere the captain gained his side. But upon his temple the death-mark of *Scarlet Death* was plainly visible! He was not dead, and Rossgrove bent over the man and spoke to him. There was no response. The next instant, however, there was a sudden "whirr" in

the air behind the captain; then he felt something encircle his form and pinion his arms at his side. He was then jerked violently to the earth, and dragged into the shadows of the thicket. When permitted to stop, he heard the soft tramp of feet around him. He saw the dark outlines of human forms above him. He was a prisoner—insnared in the coils of a lasso!

One of his captors proceeded to bind his hands. This accomplished, a heavy, musty blanket was thrown over his head and shoulders and confined with a thong; then a gruff voice—the voice of an Indian speaking bad English—bade him rise to his feet.

Seeing resistance was useless, the captain complied with the order, then with the lasso which still encircled his form, he was conducted away through the forest.

For a long time—for what seemed weary hours to the captive—they traveled on through the dark, tangled undergrowth and intricate mazes of the great wood, until they finally came to a temporary halt.

The captain was securely bound to a tree, yet it was some time before the blanket was removed from his head. When it was, however, the broad, vivid glare of a light almost blinded him, but as his eyes became somewhat accustomed to the dazzling glow, a wonderful spectacle was presented to his view.

The glow of a dozen camp-fires lit up the little oblong glade in which they were halted, and the light reflected by the green foliage on every side, gave the place a wild, weird appearance—the appearance of the interior of some old, deserted hall of bygone ages.

And to and fro across this great mysterious hall stalked Titan figures robed in blankets wrought in strange devices, while tall plumes waved and nodded about their heads. Rossgrove knew these forms were those of Indians—all of whom wore the ensign of chiefs, with the exception of the guard that stood at his side.

Other chiefs came from the woods and joined those in that grim old forest hall. Something of an unusual character seemed to be drawing the red-men there, but what it was Rossgrove could not form the faintest conception by their movements and talk, but judging by their malignant scowls that at times were bestowed upon him, he had reason to believe he was the object of their convening there.

At length an aged chief, to whom all the others seemed to pay homage, rode from the forest into the glade with the bearing of a king.

This man was the celebrated *Black Hawk*, the friend of the white man. He had met his subordinates there to hold council over the violation of his treaty with the Great Father at Washington, by the little band of claim-locators.

The council was at once opened by *Black Hawk*, who exerted all his eloquence against that of his chiefs, who favored an appeal to the war-path to enforce their rights to the Reserve, and who were in favor of hanging the claim-locators' scalps at their girdles as a warning to all other white trespassers.

Rossgrove could not understand a word that was said, and so he began speculating on his chances of escape. He soon discovered, however, that no effort of his own could undo his bonds.

Black Hawk addressed his war-chiefs with all the eloquence of which he was master, and this drew the attention of the guard toward the circle of councilors. He stood, his whole soul seeming absorbed by the eloquence of the chief.

Even the captain could not help gazing in admiration on the stately form of the speaker.

While thus engaged, something brushed the captain's cheek and a shadow fell across his vision. Something came between his eyes and the head of the savage guard.

He started when he saw a huge hand and great, hairy, muscular arm appear from the opposite side of the great oak to which he was bound.

The great bony fingers were open and were moving slowly toward the Indian's neck, as if to grasp

it; then a quick movement—and the giant's fingers are fastened upon the savage's throat.

The red man gasps for breath and struggles for liberty. He cannot cry out, and the voice of the chief drowns what slight noise he makes.

Still the captain can see no form to which that hand and arm belong; and now he shrinks away with horror, for he sees the eyeballs of the savage start from their sockets and the tongue protrude from the open jaws as the great, bony fingers of the unknown destroyer close upon his throat in that death-grasp.

CHAPTER V. OLD HURRICANE.

It was a moment of extreme anxiety, uncertainty and horror to Captain Rossgrove. He knew not but that the second hand of this monster was being reserved for his own throat. But in this his fears were soon set at rest, when the colossal form of a man made its appearance from the opposite side of the tree.

A single glance told the captain he was a friend, though a stranger. He was a man not over three and thirty years of age, and standing nearly seven feet in his moccasins. He was dressed in a neat-fitting suit of buckskin, made as if to display the wonderful development of the wearer's form. His shoulders were broad and massive as those of an ox, and his breast deep and swelling. His arms were long, muscular and sinewy, and his hands large, brown and hardened to knots of steel. A large and well-shaped head was set upon a stout, swelling neck, and from beneath the wolf-skin cap that surmounted it, a wreath of dark-brown hair hung down his back.

His face was a little angular and covered with a beard that hung to his breast.

Withal, he was a noble specimen of manhood—a man to be admired as well as feared. Nor was he a character of the author's imagination. He was a true, living hero of the woods, whose name is familiar to many yet living.

As he appeared before the captain, the fingers of his right hand fastened upon the savage's throat, he reached forward with the left, in which he held a knife and severed the captain's thongs. Then he sheathed the knife, and with both hands he lifted the savage aloft as though he had been a child, and hurled him to the earth with a force that would have crushed the life from a common being.

"Now, stranger," said the giant, turning to Rossgrove, "let us count tracks like lightning for safer quarters."

The giant took the lead, and followed by Rossgrove, crossed the glade and plunged into the purple gloom of the woods. From the crotch of a tree, the hunter snatched a long rifle as he hurried on still further into the depths of the forest.

Not a word was spoken by either, nor did they slacken their footsteps until they had put a safe distance between them and the Indians. Then they came to a halt in a little moonlit opening. The giant borderman now turned and gazed down upon the captive.

"I say, stranger," he said, in a tone not unlike the gentle roar of a lion, "the red devils had you haltered up like a lamb for the sacrifice."

"Yes," replied Rossgrove, "I was in a close and painful situation, and would have stood no show of escape but for your timely assistance. And now, who am I indebted to for my rescue?"

"No one, stranger, no one; if 't hadn't been for the shadow of that tree to which you war bound, and the clash and bang of ole Black Hawk's tongue, I couldn't 'a' done nuthin'. So you see, your escape is owin' to fate. I did, howsumever, squiz the red's jugular, but that's nothin' when a feller gits used to it. Why, I've been in active sarvice as a hunter, trapper and ha'r-lifter, fur nigh onto twenty years, and I never yet found my match under an Ingin scalp. There is one in these diggin's, howsumever,

that has promised his sweetheart my scalp as a present, and not until she gits it is she to marry him. His name is Big-Foot, and, stranger, if that squaw never becomes Missus Big-Foot till she gits my scalp from her lover's hand, she's doomed for an ole maid. Howsumever, eny Ingin is welcome to the scalp of Ole Hurricane, that can git it."

"Hurricane?" repeated Rossgrove; "then Hurricane is your name?"

"It's not edzactly the name my mother gave me, but then, as 'em Yallerstone fellers seen fit to call me Ole Hurricane, I guess it'll soot. What's your handle, stranger?"

"John Rossgrove."

"Just so! Wal, how comes it you're in these parts, John, and what war you doin' in the Ingins' hands?"

Rossgrove informed him of the object that had brought him to the country, and of the dangers with which they were threatened by the Indians and robbers, as well as of the manner of his capture.

"Then you've friends about, have you?" asked Hurricane.

"I have a dozen friends up the river."

"Up the river? What do you mean, John?"

"My friends are encamped on the Des Moines river, near the mouth of Chequest Creek."

"You're surely out of your latitude, John," replied the jovial, blunt-spoken hunter. "Why, you're ten miles west o' the river."

"Is it possible that I have been so deceived in the course taken by my captors?"

"It are, sure as gully. But see here, John; you war sayin' the Ingins and robbers war *de-tarmined* to run you fellers off the Resarve, and you say you won't run—that you'll raise a muss fust. Now that's what I call true, royal grit, and if yer conscience is clear, why, stick to yer resolutions and fight to the bitter end. And now, John, Ole Hurricane is a born lover of fun, and thar's nothin' afloat I like so well as to chaw up a red-skin now and then; and say, frien' John, wouldn't you like an addition to your party in the shape o' Ole Hurricane?"

"I would, most assuredly," replied Rossgrove.

"I'm yer laddy then, John; and so we might as well lean out for camp, or them red vulgarians'll be on our track."

"Then lead the way, Hurricane. Strike the river a mile below the mouth of Chequest Creek."

They moved on, and soon came to a narrow strip of prairie, or rather a smooth, barren ridge dividing the two bodies of timber, and as there was no way to reach the woods on the opposite side otherwise than by crossing this opening, they at once began the journey, which was attended with great haste and extreme silence.

They soon gained the foot of the ridge on the opposite side, and just within the shadows of the undergrowth they came to a temporary halt.

In gazing back over their trail, they were not a little surprised to see three Indians and a dog on the summit of the ridge, boldly outlined against the clear, starry sky.

One of the Indians seemed like a giant by the side of his companion, and must have been a man of Old Hurricane's proportions.

"By the gods o' Olympus, John!" suddenly exclaimed Hurricane, "they're trailin' us! Oh, ho! I see into it now! That big lummix you see in the middle is that infurnal Fox Ingin, known as Big-Foot. He's my ekal in size, and I expect we'll make a snortin' ole fight when we come together, John. But then I'll not trouble him to-night, though I'll tell ye what I will do; I'll shoot that dog that's sniffin' out our trail, and that'll throw the red-scalpers on their own resources."

As he concluded, he raised his long rifle and leveled it upon the dog, which was about thirty rods away, and still plainly outlined against the sky.

There was a vivid flash, and the clear report of the piece rung out on the still night-air. As the echoes died away through the wooded aisles, the

sharp death-howls of the dog came to the ears of our two friends, mingled with yells of savage rage and vengeance.

"Whoop, yoop, hurrah, ye cowardly varlets up thar on the hill!" shouted Old Hurricane, at the top of his iron lungs. "Show yer greasy carcasses a minute longer if ye want a kiss from the lips of Ole Surity! Ole Hurricane arn't afeard of the hull Ingin nation. But I'll fodder Old Surity"—dropping the butt of his heavy rifle to the ground—"and then we'll heave ahead for the river."

While reloading the piece, Rossgrove asked:

"Hurricane, have you heard of Scarlet Death, the Demon of the Des Moines?"

"Oh, yas, I've heard of such a critter."

There was something in this off-hand, evasive reply that startled the captain. It forced upon his mind a conviction that grew upon him from that moment—the conviction that Old Hurricane *was* Scarlet Death himself! But, satisfied he had nothing to fear from him, he followed him on through the forest.

Two hours' brisk walking brought them to the river near the very point where the captain had been captured.

"We are not far from camp now, Hurricane," said Rossgrove, as they halted.

"Reckon not," replied Hurricane, "as we're not fur from the mouth of Chequest Creek. Did you leave your friends asleep?"

"Yes."

"Then, if they're still asleep, we'll first crawl into camp, lay down, and say nothin' to enny one till mornin'. They're all green hands, John, in border tactics, and I want to give 'em the fust lesson."

"All right, Hurricane," replied the captain.

They now bent their footsteps up the stream, and the dull, sickly glow of a camp-fire soon burst upon their view. It was the same fire around which Rossgrove had left his friends asleep.

Carefully the two moved forward, and finally halted within a dozen paces of the camp.

Old Hurricane counted ten forms wrapped from head to foot in their large, gray blankets, and lying in a circle around, and with their feet to the fire.

"You're sure them's your friends, are you, John?" asked the hunter.

"Why, yes, certainly," replied Rossgrove, a little surprised by the question; "there lie ten of them, and the eleventh one is on guard. Just in the back-ground, there, you can see our surveyor's compass, chain and flag-pole. Let's make a charge into camp, and see how sound they are sleeping."

"No, let 'em sleep, John. It'll be sich a jolly surprise to 'em when they wake up in the mornin' and see my huge carkass layin' among 'em. It'll teach 'em never to sleep so sound in these diggin's ag'in, but what they can hear the softest footstep in camp. But afore we lay down, John, we'd better put the fire out, fur fear Big-Foot and his varlets might blunder hereaways."

"Very well, Hurricane."

The two moved forward and quietly entered the camp. The men moved not in their sleep. The captain and his friend seated themselves on opposite sides of the waning camp-fire, facing each other.

Only a few red, glaring coals lit up the surrounding gloom, and as the captain gazed into the dying heap, bitter thoughts arose in his mind. These led to what had occurred before he had left camp, and he ran his eyes over the sleepers to see if the form of Wild Dick was among them. But they were all so completely enveloped in their great blankets that he could not tell one from the other.

The captain was painfully anxious for the return of Dick from the Dispute, and over the cause of that anxiety he sunk into a mental stupor, from which he was finally aroused by a touch on the shoulder. Raising his eyes, he saw Old Hurricane bending over him with a wild expression upon his face.

An exclamation of surprise arose to the lips of the captain, but it was promptly suppressed by a signi-

ficant movement of the hunter, who, bending still lower, whispered in Rossgrove's ear:

"God Almighty, John, we've committed an awful blunder!"

"What is it?—what is it, Hurricane?"

The hunter pointed at the sleeping forms around them, and replied:

"They're all Ingins, John, instead of your friends, and I'll wager my soul that that lopin' curse, Big-Foot, is under yonder blanket. Yes, we're entrapped—Ah, there! Up and fight to the death, John!"

The shrill chirp of the cricket broke the awful silence of the moment. Ten pairs of naked savage arms beat the air as one, as the ten gray blankets of the claim-locaters were thrown aside. Then, from the earth, ten savage warriors arose with a scream that thrilled through the midnight air, and rung its quavering echoes along the valley of the Des Moines.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO GIANTS' CONFLICT.

THE situation of Captain Rossgrove and Old Hurricane was one of the most imminent and deadly peril.

The savages were armed with tomahawks, and, with these uplifted, they swept toward the whites, counting upon an easy and certain victory. But they were destined to meet with an obstacle little dreamed of in their mad thirst for Old Hurricane's scalp. A dozen concealed rifles suddenly poured their leaden missiles into the ranks of the over-confident wretches, and several of their number fell dead. Then forth from the dark shadows of the surrounding forest rushed Captain Rossgrove's friends with a prolonged and startling shout, that paralyzed the limbs of the savages and struck terror to their hearts. But they soon rallied strength and courage, and the next instant the shouts of the claim-stakers, the yells of the savages, the roar of Old Hurricane's lion voice, and the clash and ring of steel, made the moment a terrible, fearful one.

But, from the beginning the odds were against the savages, and, from the first, the tide of battle went against them, and at length they were compelled to yield to the superior strength of the claim-stakers, and, in three minutes from the commencement of the fray, those of the red-skins who had not been slain were routed and driven away into the forest.

Shout after shout pealed from the lips of the victors when they found themselves masters of the field. But their victory was not a bloodless one. Two of the claim-stakers had been slain and others slightly wounded. Among the latter was the mute, Witless Seth.

"Boys," said Captain Rossgrove, as they rallied around the camp-fire, "how in the name of mystery came those savages in our camp, wrapped in your blankets?"

"I will tell you, captain," said Harry Dudley. "Nat, there, who you remember was put on guard, came and roused us all from our sleep, and informed us that he had seen you leave camp in a sort of mental abstraction, and that more than an hour had elapsed since your departure. He expressed fears of you having wandered away and got lost, or having been foully dealt with by lurking foes; so we all left our blankets and things in camp, and hurried away in search of you. The Indians must have seen our movements, and, at the same time, have been apprised of your coming, and, the devil whispering to them, suggested the idea of filling our places under the blankets with an equal number from their own ranks. But, thank God, our return was just in time to save you and the big stranger that was with you—"

"Old Hurricane, the hunter? Where is he? Where is he?" suddenly exclaimed Rossgrove, who, amid the excitement of the moment, had permitted the absence of his new friend to escape his notice.

"The last I see'd o' him, and the first, also," said Noisy Nat, "he had grappled hand-to-hand with a savage fully as big as himself."

"Hark!" suddenly exclaimed Rossgrove, "I hear a crashing in the undergrowth yonder. It must be Old Hurricane and the savage still engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter. Hark!"

All listened. All heard the thrashing of some heavy bodies among the undergrowth south of the camp. They could hear heavy, dull, sodden blows, quick, labored breathing, gasps and groans—unmistakable evidence of a silent death-struggle.

"Yes, yes; it is the hunter, boys!" exclaimed the captain. "Come, let us assist him, for a bigger and braver heart than his never throbbed!"

They all rushed to the scene of the conflict, and bent their gaze into the darkness. They could just see the outlines of the two giants clutched in each other's embrace, but the darkness and rapidity with which they changed positions prevented them from rendering the old hunter the least assistance, lest, by mistake, they might aid the savage.

Fast almost as the claim-stakers could follow up, the foes whirled away through the undergrowth and darkness toward the river!

"Boys!" exclaimed Rossgrove, "they will roll into the river! We must prevent it if possible, if we would do aught to save the life of our friend."

Several of the party hastily placed themselves between the combatants and the river, and made every effort possible to prevent the threatened danger of the borderman, but their efforts were as fruitless and feeble as a child's would have been. The giants tore away from their grasp and whirled on, over the bank into the river with a thunderous splash.

Each of them had a new danger to face and contend with, for the water at this point was deep. The claim-stakers entertained hopes of the waves parting them. But this was not the case. They fought on more desperate, more deadly than before, as if the waves had strung anew their sinews, and added vengeance to their hearts.

At times they were in plain sight on the surface of the moonlit waters, then again they were lost from view beneath the tossing waves that were gradually bearing them down the stream.

The claim-stakers could do little else than stand and watch the conflict. Now and then the foes were completely enveloped in a cloud of flying water and spray, while around them their feet beat and churned the waves to a foam.

But at length it was noticed that their strength was falling. Their demonstrations were growing less desperate, and their blows fell slow and feeble. They were under the water a good portion of the time, and this was what was winning the battle, as strangling gasps and sobs plainly indicated.

Finally their struggling ceased altogether. Then, as they again sunk from view, one of the combatants' hands was raised aloft, as if for a blow, the fingers clutching a flashing knife.

"There!" exclaimed Noisy Nat, "did ye see that flash? One o' them has drawn a knife, and the fight'll soon be over with."

"May Heaven protect our friend!" said Captain Rossgrove.

The foes sunk from view beneath the waves. A minute passed, and neither arose to the surface. Another minute dragged by, and still the waves held them down. The claim-stakers expected each instant to see one or the other rise to the surface with the scalp of his foe in hand. But they were disappointed in this; the water became calm and tranquil, and flowed on as quietly as though its bosom had never been disturbed, nor stained with human blood.

CHAPTER VII.

MORE DANGERS AND ADVENTURES.

"The waves have conquered both of them, boys," said Rossgrove, sorrowfully, "and we have lost a valuable friend—"

"No; one of them lives, captain!" suddenly exclaimed Ethan Hamilton, "Look yonder, toward the opposite shore!"

He pointed across the river, and every eye followed in the direction thus indicated, and saw a dark, spherical object upon the glimmering surface of the water, moving slowly and silently toward the opposite shore.

The moving object reached the bank. Then it rose upward from the water, followed by a pair of bronzed, massive shoulders and a large, dusky body.

The figure leaped ashore. It was the figure of the giant savage, Big-Foot!

"My God, it is the savage!" cried Captain Rossgrove. "Where is Old Hurricane?"

As if in answer to his question, the giant savage on the opposite side of the stream stopped on the white, sandy beach, and brandishing a human scalp above his head, uttered a wild, triumphant war-whoop; then turned and plunged into the impenetrable shadows of the forest beyond!

"That, boys," said Captain Rossgrove, as the triumphant Big-Foot turned and bounded away into the forest, "determines the fate of Old Hurricane. But two hours ago I would have wagered any thing, there was no one man living that could have taken the life of that hunter in a fair fight."

"I am sorry he has been slain, for we have lost a valuable friend in these perilous times, for he had promised to stand by us through thick and thin."

"And so I will, John," said a deep-bass yet pleasant voice behind them, accompanied by a massive step and movement in the undergrowth.

The claim-stakers turned, and to their joy and surprise saw Old Hurricane appear from the shadows of the shrubbery with his scalp unharmed.

"Is it possible?—reality?" exclaimed the captain. "Do not my eyes deceive me? Is it not a ghost—the ghost of my friend Hurricane?"

"Reckon not, John," replied the old hunter, breaking off into a low, silent laugh.

"Give me your hand, old fellow," returned Rossgrove; "we had given you up as dead when we saw Big-Foot swim ashore, brandish a scalp in the air, and flee into the woods with a yell of triumph."

Again the old hunter burst into a roar of laughter; and then, as he combed the water from his beard with his fingers, he said:

"That war a fatal mistake that big fool made, John—the same I'd 'a' made, perhaps, had enny of you come to my assistance."

"I do not understand you, friend Hurricane."

"Wal, I'll explain. When we war fightin' in the river, an Ingin—a friend of Big-Foot's—war standin' under the bank below here a ways. I just got a glimpse of the varlet as we two sunk under the water. When we rose to the top ag'in, the Ingin war gone, and the next minute I felt sumthin' fingerin' about my feet. I knew what it war to onc't. That Ingin had dived under the water and swum to his friend Big-Foot's assistance. But—ho! ho! ho!—as we sunk the last time we all three got mixed up so we couldn't tell which from t'other, but Big-Foot, somehow or other, got a hold of his friend's hair and scalped him instead of me. 'Bout this time a separation took place, and I went one way and Big-Foot the t'other—both swimmin' under water. And I'll swear, boys, I like to bu'st with good, sound lafter when I see'd that big red lum-mix bounce ashore, flop his friend's scalp above his head, blow off his baizoo, and go waltzin' away into the woods. But it's not over with yit. We'll meet ag'in some day, and then, John, somebody's hair must come."

The old hunter's story set things aright once more, and with a feeling of great relief, the party hastened back to the camp. Replenishing the fire with fresh fuel, a broad light soon relieved the spot from the surrounding darkness. Attention was now given to the wounded, who had forgotten their pains during the excitement of the two giants' conflict. Then the two dead comrades were wrapped in their blankets and placed aside for burial on the morrow.

The death of these two friends proved a sad blow,

and wrung the hearts of the little band with heart-felt sorrow.

A number of dead savages lay within the radius of the camp-fire. These the claim-stakers proceeded to remove into the shadows of the surrounding thicket, and while they were thus engaged, a cry suddenly burst from the lips of one of the party.

"What now, Wharley?" asked Rossgrove.

"The Demon's mark—the Scarlet Death mark!" and he pointed to a deep scarlet dent on the temple of one of the dead warriors. No other marks were upon him. The Demon's stroke had slain him.

"Remove the body," said Rossgrove, in a manner that implied a desire of silence on the subject, as he glanced involuntarily toward Old Hurricane.

Not another word was said about the mysterious slayer, for all felt satisfied the giant hunter was the Demon.

Finally when the camp had been cleared of all the slain warriors, Captain Rossgrove called the attention of his men and addressed a few words to them in regard to the dangers that menaced them.

"But, boys," he said, in his concluding remarks, "we are here by permission of Black-Hawk, the representative of the Indians, and now shall we give up the object for which we came? Or shall we remain firm to our resolutions, so long as Black-Hawk is our friend, go on and locate our claims, and avenge the death of our two friends lying there?"

"Stick to the country and locate our claims!" responded the captain's friends.

"That's the music, boys," put in Old Hurricane; "you fellers are made of the right sort of material—all grit to the backbone."

"Then the matter may be considered permanently settled," said the captain; "but if we remain here about long, we will have to erect some kind of a defense and send an escort up the Chequest for our supply-train, which consists of two wagons. But as our tools are all with the wagons, we'll have to send an escort for them at once."

This was soon satisfactorily arranged, and Noisy Nat and three men were at once dispatched for the train. As they had a long distance to travel, it would very likely, be far into the next day before they would return, even if they met with no difficulty from enemies. During their absence the main party improved the time by looking out for a location for their proposed defense.

Captain Rossgrove never hinted at the great object that was holding him in the country—at what he had seen on the river that night. He kept up a bold exterior and appeared to enjoy the jokes of his friends, but all the while, feelings and pangs of the bitterest kind were rankling in his heart and mind. He had great hopes of Wild Dick bringing some information in regard to Camilla that would afford him temporary relief. If he only knew whether she was an unwilling prisoner—whether she was being abducted or not—the load upon his heart would not be half so painful to bear.

The party again concluded to change their camp to prevent another surprise, and the new point selected was a sand-bar, jutting out into the river like a wedge. It was about a mile below their present camp, and around its margin was a fringe of dense reeds concealing the approach from the river.

When they arrived at the peninsula the claim-stakers spread their blankets on the sand, and threw themselves upon them for repose.

Here they reclined, conversing in a low tone, when Witless Seth, the mute, who had strolled away into the woods along the shore, came bounding into their midst in great excitement.

Captain Rossgrove arose to his feet and fixed an interrogative look upon the mute, which he did not fail to comprehend, for he at once began gesticulating in an excited manner. He succeeded in drawing the attention of our friends to a number of canoes, loaded with Indians, coming up the river.

"It's a hull convoy of the red barbarians," said Old Hurricane,

"Do you think they will pass without discovering us?" asked the captain.

"It's hard to tell. They've hounds' noses on a scent. I opine we'd better bash ourselves till they pass, and right here in these reeds will be a magnimbonum place, boys," replied Old Hurricane, leading the way toward the fringe of tall stalks.

The whole party hastily ensconced themselves among the dense reeds on the upper side of the peninsula, where they could command a view of both the sand-bar and the river.

In a moment all was still as death. But this lasted only for a moment. The dip of many paddles soon came to the ears of the listeners. The sounds, however, seemed to be bearing in toward the west shore of the river, as though the voyagers intended to land. All at once the dip of paddles ceased, then followed a dull thump—thump, like persons leaping to the ground and the next minute two score of Indian warriors made their appearance on the bar, within ten paces of our friends.

"By heavens, captain, they've landed on the peninsula!" whispered Harry Dudley.

"Yes, yes!" replied the captain; "but as we value our lives, let us keep silent. One sound will betray our presence!"

Every movement the foe made was carefully noted by the whites. They saw some of them lay aside their rifles and depart into the forest. They saw them return a few minutes later with loads of dry sticks and boughs, which were deposited in the center of the peninsula.

By this it was readily perceived what was up. The savages were going to strike a fire, and the light would be sure to reveal their tracks in the sand, and these would lead to their discovery in the reeds.

"Tell yer friends to yer right," said Old Hurricane to the man at his side, "to keep a sharp lookout, a stiff upper lip, and red dy for the wust. If we're discovered, we'll have to make a dash fur our lives and a rush fur the woods."

The old borderman's advice was communicated from one to the other of the party, and every one nerved himself for the worst.

A fire was kindled by the warriors in the center of the peninsula. Then most of them threw themselves on the earth around it in positions of listless repose. Some filled the bowls on the head of their tomahawks and began to smoke, while others entered into a low conversation.

While the savages remained there upon the bar, there was no avenue of escape open to the whites. The river was at their backs, and to reach the woods they would be compelled to expose themselves to the Indians' eyes and rifles.

Several minutes dragged by.

At length a cry from one of the savages breaks upon every ear.

The warrior has discovered a white man's track in the sand.

A word, and every warrior was upon his feet.

"Look out, boys, the tug is comin'!" was Old Hurricane's injunction, communicated from man to man.

Like a hound, the savage that had made the discovery glided hither and thither over the peninsula. He moved toward the reeds, his form bent forward and his eyes fixed upon the sand. Then he came to a sudden stop. His acute ear had caught a rustle among the reeds.

The eyes of our friends are upon his movements.

Suddenly there is a sharp rustle in the reeds—something clips through the blades. The savage utters a cry of agony, staggers and falls to the earth under a violent blow from an unseen hand!

Friends rush to his side and bend over him. A cry walls from their lips. They shrink back from the fallen warrior with terror written upon their dusky faces. Two words pass from lip to lip:

"Scarlet Death!"

The Demon had slain the warrior! The Demon

was in the reeds, and the claim-stakers started too, when they had been apprised of the fact.

For a moment the savages stand appalled; then the sound of new terror fills their ears. It is a low, plaintive cry as if of agony. It comes from the depth of their camp-fire, as though something was perishing in the crackling flame.

The astonished, terrified savages fix their eyes upon the fire. Those painful cries increase. They see the fire is disturbed. There is life within it, and terror-stricken the red-men turn and flee from the spot.

But still that cry in the flames is heard.

Suddenly a figure issued from the reeds into the glare of the light.

It was the figure of Old Hurricane, and his brown, bearded face was convulsed with silent laughter.

"Come out, boys!" he at length called. "The red varlets have waltzed away like autumn leaves in terror. They'll venture hereaways no more to-night."

The claim-stakers, followed by Witless Seth, the mute, came from their concealment and joined the hunter.

And still that piteous cry in the flames was heard, though it was growing fainter each moment.

"I'll eend that poor critter's sufferin'," said Old Hurricane, and advancing to the fire he brushed aside the brands with his moccasined foot, and but a few inches under the surface of the sand he found a large mud-turtle in the last agonies of death.

The mystery of the flame stood explained.

Near the fallen savage that bore the mark of Scarlet Death, the imprint of a cloven hoof was found leading into the reeds. But despite all these mysteries and dangers, Old Hurricane uttered a yell of triumph that rolled in prolonged echoes through the forest aisles.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUMB SPY AT WORK.

WE will now leave the claim-stakers for a while to follow up the adventuresome footsteps of Wild Dick, who, it will be remembered, went to the Dispute to personate his mute brother, Witless Seth.

By following the directions detailed to him by his mute brother, a few hours' brisk walking brought him to the outskirts of the little settlement or village called Spain. The place lay plainly revealed by the moonlight, and gaining a prominence from whence he could command a general view of the place, Dick proceeded to locate the different prominent buildings, as he had already located them in his mind from the description given by his brother. This being accomplished, satisfactorily to himself at least, he proceeded on toward Beaver Lake, where Seth was to meet Lieutenant Thoms and his men.

He had no difficulty in finding them, for the stormy voice of the impatient lieutenant was distinctly heard several rods away. He had grown restless and impatient with waiting, and cursed, with impotent rage, the stupidity of Witless Seth, for being absent so long.

For a moment Wild Dick hesitated. He now realized more fully the great risk he was running, but having placed a good-sized pebble in his mouth, and nerved himself for his first appearance in the star role of the Dumb Spy, he marched boldly forward to beard the lion in his den!

"Ah!" sneered the lieutenant, as he emerged from the shadows of the undergrowth, "here's the stupid snail at last."

Dick drew a breath of relief, for he saw the robbers did not detect his disguise, which he felt satisfied they would do at first sight, if they did at all.

Thoms advanced close to him and raising his hand so that his fingers could be distinctly seen, asked, in the mute language:

"Have you been to those claim-stakers' camp?"

The Dumb Spy informed them that he had by a nod of the head; then Thoms communicated the fact to his friends,

"How many of them are there?" he then questioned the spy.

"Twelve," the latter replied, with a flash of his fingers.

"And where are they camped?"

"On Chequest Creek, four miles from the river."

"Are they well armed?"

"Not very well."

"Hurrah!" shouted Thoms, turning to his friends and imparting the information just received. "But see here, boys," he added, "we had better make that trip on horseflesh, for it is several miles up to the Chequest," which was instantly agreed to by all the outlaws.

"Then let us get our horses and be off at once," said Thoms.

As they moved away, the lieutenant turned to the Dumb Spy, and raising his hand, said with his fingers:

"Seth, you can go to your nest and go to bed. We'll need your services to-morrow night again."

The Dumb Spy replied to the robber with simply a nod, and then trudged on behind him into the village, his sides shaking with suppressed laughter over the success of his adventure.

Thoms and his men were soon mounted and flying northward toward the Chequest with all possible speed.

Dick found his brother's "nest," as Thoms had designated the room occupied by the mute, but, instead of going to bed, he went out and spent a good portion of the night in strolling through the village, familiarizing himself with its location and prominent features.

Late in the night, while thus wandering about, he was suddenly startled by the sound of voices and footsteps approaching from the direction of the river. Hurrying in the direction from whence these sounds emanated, he caught sight of half a dozen men moving through the village. Four of them were carrying a kind of litter upon which lay what he supposed to be a figure of the woman.

He mentally resolved to follow this party and see what they had and where they went to, but the next moment the clatter of horses' hoofs broke upon the air, and, to elude discovery, he was compelled to seek shelter around the angle of a cabin.

Then a party of horsemen swept apast. He saw they were Thoms and his men returning from their nocturnal raid upon the claim-stakers.

As those on foot had, by this time, passed out of sight, the Dumb Spy beat a hasty retreat to his room. This was a small apartment in the rear of a large cabin, the front room of which was known as the "court-room," where "Judge" Raft dispensed the Club Laws of the Dispute, in assumed earnestness; but, as the "Judge" was also the notorious outlaw chief, Reckless Ralph, the court-room at times became the council-room of the freebooters.

The Dumb Spy's room was meanly furnished. A stool, a rude, rickety table, and a small couch of furs and blankets constituted the furniture.

Dick had scarcely made himself familiar with his surroundings when the sound of a booted foot in the adjoining apartment startled him. This was succeeded by a faint beam of light streaming through a crack in the partition separating his room from the "Judge's" office.

Applying his eye to the opening, Dick inspected the court-room. He saw a tall, fine-looking man, with a dark eye and handsome face, seated near a long table toying with the hilt of a knife, ever and anon glancing impatiently toward the door as if expecting some one. As Dick rightly judged, this was the notorious robber-chief, Reckless Ralph.

A moment later another man entered the court-room. It was Lieutenant Thoms.

Dick bent his ear to the crack and listened.

"Hullo, good-evening, Judge," Thoms shouted. "I'm pleased to see your manly face in Spain again, which, of itself, speaks of your success abroad."

A clear, musical laugh pealed from the lips of the outlaw-chief, as he replied:

"Did you get my note, Thoms?"

"I did, and forthwith I sent Witless Seth out to spy the enemy's numbers and location. When he came back we mounted our horses and rode up to exterminate the claim-stakers. But what do you think! Why, we found the camp deserted, and Jules Devreaux lying dead as a door-nail within it!"

"The furies! Jules Devreaux dead?"

"Yes, *dead*, and bearing the mark of that accursed Demon, Scarlet Death."

"And what about the claim stakers?"

"They were gone; every mother's son of them had left for parts unknown."

Reckless Ralph arose and paced the floor like one in deep and painful meditation.

"Curse that Scarlet Death!" he at last broke forth; "he will be the death of us all yet. I tell you, Cale Thoms, that lurking fiend must be hunted down; and that ere it is too late. I will put Witless Seth upon his trail, and if there is a hound in creation that can track him to his lair, it is that dumb fool."

Wild Dick ground his teeth with rage when he heard his unfortunate brother thus spoken of.

The outlaws conversed a while longer, then left the court-room.

Dick sought his couch to rest, but not to sleep. The thoughts revolving through his mind banished all desire for slumber. Almost step by step he reviewed the perilous grounds over which he had traveled since leaving the claim-stakers' camp.

The night wore slowly away. Early the following morning the Dumb Spy was summoned into the presence of Reckless Ralph in the court-room.

The outlaw fixed a gaze upon him that made him almost tremble through fear of being detected. But the keen-eyed robber failed to penetrate the disguise, and a sense of relief came to Wild Dick when the outlaw held up his hand and said in the mutes' language:

"I have some work for you!" and he proceeded to instruct the spy in the work he desired him to perform.

With a vacant, simple smile, well assumed, the Dumb Spy replied, in his silent language:

"All right, captain; I'll find them for you."

So saying, he left the room, and shortly after he was moving northward through the woods.

It was night ere he returned. He found a number of the outlaws assembled in the court-room, armed to the teeth. They were there waiting the return of the spy, who at once informed them that the claim-stakers were encamped on the Des Moines river, at the mouth of Chequest Creek.

This, however, was not exactly the case. The claim-stakers had been encamped there the night before, and to make the outlaws believe that it had recently been deserted, the spy stirred up the old camp-fire and heaped an arm-load of fuel upon it. Then he returned to Spain; not, however, before he had seen his friends and apprised them of what was going on.

Feeling certain of the destruction of the claim-locaters, Reckless Ralph and a score of his men set out for the mouth of Chequest Creek.

By midnight they were all back at Spain, in the court-room, holding what might be termed an indignation meeting.

The Dumb Spy in his room heard all, and knew at once the cause of their wrath. They had found the camp of the trespassers deserted. They knew the spy had not been mistaken, for the remains of their camp-fire were still smoldering there.

The band was finally dismissed to meet at dark the next night. Reckless Ralph, Lieutenant Thoms, and another called Doctor Grimm, however, remained in the room for further discussion of the escape of the claim-locaters.

"I'll tell you, boys," said the doctor, after the men had all left, "them claim-stakers are causin' us some

trouble, and before we git rid of *them*, we've got to git rid of somethin' else, I'm thinkin'."

"You're too deep for me, doctor," said Reckless Ralph.

"Well, to come right to the point, there's a traitor in our midst, else them claim-stakers would never have got wind of our movements this second time. We *must* find out who it is."

"I agree with you there," answered Reckless Ralph. "I've been under that impression for a long time. But how, in Heaven's name, will you do it?"

"Leave it to me; be ready to go from hence in ten minutes. We three can hit upon some plan for future action, and keep it from the men until the moment comes when they'll be needed."

"Well, I'd like to know what the man means," said Thoms.

"Summon Witless Seth here, and you will soon see."

It is useless to say Wild Dick heard all this, and was at quite a loss to know what the outlaw had in view. In a few minutes, however, he was in the presence of three confederates.

"Seth," said the robber captain, with his fingers, "go at once and bring the large canoe lying at the head of Beaver Lake around to the beach opposite Talbott's cabin. I want you to paddle Grimm, Thoms and myself to the middle of the lake."

The whole matter at once became clear to the mind of Wild Dick, and as he proceeded toward the lake, he could scarcely restrain his emotions, engendered by the joke he was perpetrating upon them.

"Yes—te-he! he!" he snickered to himself, "they propose to hold a council in the middle of the lake, a hundred rods from land, where no ears but their own will hear. I suppose they forgot their God'll hear 'em. Of course they'll take their faithful dog, the Dumb Spy, Witless Seth, along to man the boat. He can't hear what they say—oh, no; of course he can't—te-he! he!"

He had no trouble in finding the boat. It was a goodly-sized concern, made of skins stretched over a framework of wood. It was lying mostly upon the beach, and as he stooped to the effort of launching it, the spirit of mischief seemed to have whispered something in his ear, and he at once resolved to have some fun with the outlaws at the risk of losing his own life. So, taking out his knife, he cut a round hole in the bottom of the canoe near its center. Then into this he drove a plug of rags which could be removed at will by a slight pressure of the foot.

The craft was now launched, and taking his seat therein, he took up the paddle and put the boat in motion. He soon came to the designated spot.

The trio of worthies were there, and, by order of Reckless Ralph, the prow of the canoe was turned toward the center of the lake.

Being a skillful hand with the paddle, the Dumb Spy sent the boat skimming over the waters of the lake, at the same time keeping the plug in the bottom of the craft concealed with his foot.

When the desired point was at last reached, the canoe was brought to a stand, and the outlaws began an earnest conversation.

There, under the clear, starry sky, they laid deep and damnable plots for the massacre of, not only the claim-stakers, but the old Indian chief, Black-Hawk. Then with the double assurance that their plans were unknown to all but themselves, Reckless Ralph passed his bottle, and ordered the boat headed for the village.

The Dumb Spy at once complied with the order, and they were soon moving homeward. Raft's tongue, beginning to play loosely from its frequent lubrications with bad liquor, now rattled away incessantly in heaping anathemas upon the claim-stakers' heads.

"Easy, captain, easy; don't go off on a tangent, nor get too hot with passion, or we'll have to give you a bath," said Dr. Grimm, with a laugh.

"I guess you all need it," mused Wild Dick, and

with his foot he pressed the plug from the hole in the bottom of the canoe, unobserved.

The pressure of the canoe on the water caused a perfect jet to boil up into the craft, and ere the outlaws were aware of it, the concern was half filled.

"Fire and furies!" yelled the robber-chief, "the boat's sprung a leak—the bottom's out—she's filling—out, boys, and swim for your lives!"

Out sprung the robber in the lake, followed by his confederates, Grimm and Thoms, and the next instant they were struggling with the waves.

"The mute! the mute!" shouted Thoms, "he'll drown."

"Curse the mute!" sputtered the heartless Grimm.

Dick, however, was faring very well. Remaining in the sinking canoe, he seized the plug as soon as the last robber was overboard, and stopped the leak. Then, with the paddle, he began bailing the water out, and ere this was accomplished, the outlaws were some distance away swimming for dear life.

Reckless Ralph and Thoms made their way safely to the shore, but Grimm was not heard of again until a month later, when the robbers found his body on the south side of the lake, where it had been washed ashore.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO ANGELS.

It will be remembered that Nolsy Nat and three of the claim-stakers were sent to bring up the train belonging to the party, and that they were expected to return on the day following their departure. The time allotted for the party's return went by, but they did not come. Two days passed without their appearance, and now misgivings of a serious nature began to rise. During the two days of waiting the claim-stakers had lain inactive for want of necessary tools to begin their fort. Besides, their whereabouts had become known to the robbers and Indians, and it required all the stratagem the Dumb Spy could employ to keep them on the wrong trail.

The train not having made its appearance on the third day after Nat's departure, it was decided to send out a second party to investigate the cause of the train's non-appearance.

Old Hurricane and Harry Dudley volunteered their services for the trip, and the two took their departure, going in a north-westerly direction.

Their course, after leaving the Des Moines timber, lay through a rough and hilly section of country, covered with a dense growth of red brush, and diversified with small, murmuring water-courses.

Toward the close of the day, Old Hurricane informed his companion that they were drawing near the western boundary of the Black-Hawk Purchase, and that about six miles north of where they would touch the line was the point where the claim-stakers had left their train.

"I presume there is no one living through these parts?" said Dudley, impressed with the desolate solitude of the surrounding hills.

"Yes, Harry," replied the old borderman, "off hereaways there are two cabins. Thar's two families livin' there, but I've allers been a little juberous of them. They've too much intercourse with them Dispute fellers. But I sw'ar, lad, thar's some fine—yes, angel-lookin' gals 'round thar. I know they're out of their place, too, just as much as a rose would be among a bed of Canada thistles."

This information did not kindle a spark of enthusiasm in Harry's breast. The words of the hunter fell with indifference on his ears. But Harry had reason for his passive demeanor. A secret locked within his young heart excluded all other emotions in which a woman's face or charms were concerned.

The two journeyed on. It was near sunset when the keen eye of Old Hurricane detected a thin column of white smoke curling heavenward from a patch of bushes that crowned an adjacent bluff.

A halt was at once made.

"I must inquire into that smoke, Harry, hereaways," said Old Hurricane. "It may be friends

and it may not. I'll jist make a *detour* thereaways, and if it's friends I'll signal to you from yander bald ridge. If it's enemies, I'll slip back here again," and the next moment the form of the hunter was lost to view among the dense shrubbery.

Harry now had a moment for mental speculation, but a keen sense of his loneliness impressed his mind so forcibly as to create a desire for a more perfect view of his surroundings, and, ascending a little knoll, he suddenly caught sight of two cabins standing close in under the shadows of the bluffs, where the prairie began.

The young surveyor felt certain they were the same cabins of which Old Hurricane had made mention, for he saw, by the smoke rising from the chimney-tops, that they were occupied.

While he stood watching for other signs of life about the cabins, the sound of voices and the tramp of approaching feet arrested his attention.

Turning, he saw two men coming down the valley toward him. There was a rough, brigandish look about their features, dress and movements that impressed Harry unfavorably, and so he at once concealed himself in a clump of bushes.

The men came on, talking in ungau'd tones as men will talk in conflict of opinions.

Harry bent his ear and listened. One of them was saying:

"No, this thing's run on long enough, Mobile. Fur three years we've been dilly-dallyin' along about the price of that girl; but I'll not give a red more than I've offered; and ten to one that fellow will git wind of her being in these diggin's, and then we'll have her stolen from both of us."

From this Harry gleaned that a girl was being sold by one of the villains to the other. He listened for Mobile's reply. He heard him say:

"Your talk 'bout that feller, Thoms, will have little bearin' on my decision, for I won't scare. However, I guess you can take her at your figures, and I tell you, she's devilish cheap, for thar's not a purtier face this side of the Mississippi. If she war my own chick, cussed if you'd git her fur twic't that price. She and Dolly are out ridin' now. Lordy, but that Dolly 'll bring me a snug fortune some day."

"Suppose they should meet them claim-stakers?" asked Thoms, the outlaw lieutenant.

"It'd be all up atwixt you and Dora."

Had a clap of thunder burst over his head, Harry would not have started more violently than when he heard that name spoken.

"Dora! Dora!" he repeated to himself. "Can it be my Dora, whom a cruel fate tore from me—"

He started. As if in answer to the question he would have asked himself, the clatter of horses' hoofs, mingled with the clear, musical laugh of a young girl, rung out on the evening air, and the next moment two young girls, mounted upon spirited ponies, came galloping down the valley and swept apart Harry like the wind.

But he had caught a sight of their faces, and he started up, as if to pursue them. The color receded from his face, then arose to his lips the words:

"Dora! Dora!"

But the words were drowned in the clatter of the ponies' feet, and, before he could repeat them, Dora had swept from view down the valley.

"Dora, my darling!" he exclaimed, as if starting from a trance. "I thank the fate that sent me here—that discovered you to me! I must see you, Dora, and—"

"Do you know 'em, Harry?"

Harry started. Old Hurricane stood at his side. He had approached unobserved, and had heard the young man's soliloquy.

Harry's face turned red, and he became greatly confused.

"Don't take on, lad," said the old hunter; "do you know them girls, or were't love at first sight?"

"No, Hurricane, no. The one on the brown pony, I know well, and I will tell you all about it, Hurricane. Her name is Dora Marlin. Four years ago I

became acquainted with her in Illinois. We were in each other's society a great deal, and finally our acquaintance grew into love, and we were to have been married. But a week before the time fixed for our marriage, Dora disappeared. Where she went to, and *why* she went away, have been a mystery to me ever since. Some hinted that she had gone away to avoid me, but I never believed it, Hurricane, never. And now that I have found her, I must have an interview with her before I leave."

"That's true love and royal grit, Harry," said Old Hurricane; "and count me one in case of trouble. But, let me tell you the news. I met Naisy Nat a few minutes ago. He war over this way scoutin'—lookin' after that same smoke. He says the train's all right, and 'll reach the river to-morrow. They're encamped now 'bout two miles from here. So now, Harry, as the train's all right, and we've nothin' partic'lar to do, we might see 'bout this love affair of yours. I'm not much on makin' love myself, but many's the chap I've backed in sich difflkilt scrapes. But I'll bet thar's some devilish mean work 'bout that girl Dora runnin' off from you. Many's the chat I've had with her; an' I swear, lad, it's music to listen to the rattle of her tongue, and that of her little sister Dolly, as the other girl is called. Whenever I feel down in the mouth, I go there jist to hear them angels talk and sing; then I feel better. And it's not *Old* Hurricane with them, Harry; it's *Uncle* Hurricane; and I'm jist fool enough to think, lad, that they were aers pleased to see me come. Dolly's got a lover, too—a hunter-boy, and friend of mine. He's called the Boy Ranger, tho' his name is Ransom Kendall, and a braver boy never set a trap nor drew bead on a red-skin. But then, it's no use talkin', Harry. Dolly and Dora's not Ole Abel Mobile's darters. I can tell kith and kin at sight."

"Then you have been about their place frequently?" said Harry.

"Many's the time, lad; but I aers thought the men were rascals. But you remember that smoke I went to see about? Well, thar's a pack of Ingins camped there, and Abel Mobile and that Thoms had been there visitin' with 'em, and I know thar's deviltry on foot, for the reds are in war-paint."

Harry made no reply. He became silent and thoughtful. He was thinking how he could bring about an interview with Dora.

Old Hurricane read his thoughts and said:

"Leave it all to me, lad, and before another sun rises you shall see your Dora. Come, let's be movin'."

CHAPTER X.

THE BOY RANGER AND THE HOT TRAIL.

It was night, but the great round moon was up, its silvery beams making checkers of light and shadow beneath a great spreading oak, where, to and fro, a figure paced in silent restlessness.

The figure was that of a man, but the moonbeams falling upon his face told he was a boy in years. He was dressed in the garb of a hunter, and in his belt was a knife and a brace of pistols, while against the tree under which he waited, leaned a handsome rifle.

As the moments stole on, the lithe figure of a female glided from the dense shadows of the undergrowth, and approached the impatient youth.

The young hunter clasped the figure in his arms; and as he pushed back the shawl that was thrown hood-like over her head, he gazed into the rosy face and dark lustrous eyes of Dolly Mobile, his betrothed.

"Still true to me as ever, my darling little girl," the impulsive youth said, imprinting a kiss on her fair brow.

"And always will be, Ransom," she said, softly, as her little dimpled hand stole slyly into his hard palm.

"I thank Heaven for it, Dolly," he replied, joyfully, "for you are all I have in the world to love,

and I hope your father has consented to allow me to visit you at his house."

"No, he is obstinate—more so than ever; and today I have been very miserable, indeed, and yet I have been happy."

"Why so, Dolly?"

"I have been miserable to learn that Abel Mobile is not my father, and happy, too, to know that I am not the child of Abel Mobile, for he is leagued with the outlaws of the Dispute, and he has actually sold poor Dora to Cale Thoms, of Spain, and has received gold for her. She is to be taken away to-morrow."

"Great Heaven! is this possible? Are you not mistaken, Dolly?"

"I am not, Ransom; and you are to hear the worst yet; there was a man named Jack Hupp here yesterday to buy me."

"Oh, God!" groaned the young ranger; "Abel Mobile must be a human monster! But tell me, Dolly, what was the result of the interview of Hupp and Mobile?"

"The bargain was not closed. They stood on a difference of a few dollars. But Hupp was to be back soon, and then, Ransom, I fear the result will go against me."

"Then Mobile is neither your father nor Dora's?"

"No. Dora is the child of his wife's sister, and I am the child of his first wife, who was a widow when he married her; so he is only a step-father, and a cruel one, too. When we moved from Montrose here he kidnapped Dora and brought her along; and don't you think, Ransom, she was to have been married a week afterward to a young man of whom she talks a great deal."

"And why has she never attempted to escape?"

"She is afraid to. She is watched and threatened with all kinds of punishments. Besides, she has given up in despair of ever meeting her lover again."

"This is a hundred-fold worse than I could ever have dreamed of Abel Mobile. Dolly, you and Dora both must go with me—you must be saved from these villains' power. I will take you to the settlement, about fifty miles north of here. There you will find friends and safety. You must go, Dolly; I will listen to no protest."

"But if I should consent, and we be caught in our flight—oh, Ransom! I shudder to think what the forfeit will be."

"Once clear of these hills, Dolly, and I defy the power of Abel Mobile to get us. My horse is near here, and you and Dora can ride, and I will walk and lead the way."

"Oh, Ransom! Ransom!" Dolly cried, hesitating between a sense of right and wrong; "this is a dangerous, and, I fear, an imprudent step for me to take. I do wish Uncle Hurricane would happen along—"

"I'm right here, my dear youngsters, and have been for the last half-hour."

The lovers started at the sound of the voice, but when they recognized it as that of the object of their wishes, Old Hurricane, their fears turned to joy; and the next moment the old hunter and Harry Dudley stepped from the shadows of the undergrowth before them.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" cried Dolly.

"Your coming has been just in the right hour, this time, Hurricane," said Ransom.

"I presume so, youngster," said the old hunter.

"This chap is my friend, Harry Dudley."

"Harry Dudley!" cried Dolly; "that is his name—the name of Dora's lover!"

"Pardon me, Miss Dolly," said Dudley, apologetically; "but we have had the extreme impudence to permit ourselves to be eavesdroppers to your interview. I have heard your story about Dora. Now, while Abel Mobile and his companions are reveling in a drunken spree, pray, will you not see Dora and tell her Harry Dudley awaits an interview with her?"

Wild with excitement and joy, Dolly fluttered away

into the shadows toward the cabins, eager to deliver her message to Dora.

The trio, waiting under the oak, planned the course for their flight with the maidens, and it was at once decided to seek the camp of the claim-stakers.

The minutes wore by. It was nearly time for the maidens' coming, when a silence that was unnatural in its intensity, was suddenly succeeded by the shrieks of female voices calling for help, mingled with fierce, brutal execrations.

Full well the trio under the oak knew its meaning. The maidens had been captured in their attempted flight.

"Great God, Hurricane, they must be rescued!" cried Dudley, almost frantic.

"Yes, if we have to take them dead," added the Boy Ranger.

"Take it cool, lads. We'll not leave these diggin's without 'em gals. Come, let's mosey right into the cabin afore they harm them."

Noiselessly the three glided from under the oak and approached the cabin of Abel Mobile.

At the door they paused.

"Stay right here, boys, till I call you," said Old Hurricane; then turning, he pushed the door open and strode unceremoniously into the room.

"What the cats is up in here?" he exclaimed, in his usual stormy tone, as he planted himself in the middle of the floor, and gazing about in well-affected wonder, took in the situation.

He saw the maidens locked in each other's embrace, seated on a bench in one corner. Abel Mobile stood near them with the shawls which he had just torn from the girls' shoulders, laying on his arm, while Cale Thoms and another man, whom the hunter recognized as the notorious Jack Hupp, sat on the opposite side of the room with a drunken leer on their besotted, bloated features.

At sight of Old Hurricane, who had swept like a tornado into the cabin, Mobile ceased his cursing, and turning, confronted the intruder with a savage frown; but, when he saw who it was before him, his features assumed a different expression.

"Ho, Hurricane, ole friend," he exclaimed, with well-affected pleasure on meeting him; "be seated, man; be seated!"

"I declar' I thought the house was afire, I heard sich a noise in here," replied the hunter, declining the proffered seat, "and so I jist drapped in to 'quire into the matter."

"Oh, it's all right now, Hurricane; I war jist lecturin' them runaway gals; devilish impident little tigers to go lopin' around through the woods arter night—away from their paternal roof."

The maidens having calmed their emotions and discovered who the intruder was, sprung across the room to his side, and clasped him by the hands.

"Oh, Uncle Hurricane! Abel has sold me to that drunken robber!" cried Dora, flashing a wild, terrified look upon Thoms. "Oh, I pray you will save us, Uncle Hurricane!"

"So, ho!" exclaimed the old hunter, in a thunderous tone, "then this is an auction-room, eh? Here's where sich angels as these are bought and sold, eh? Well, I'll take both of these little buds, and go a cool thousand better than the best. Now, look sharp, men; who bids higher? Going, going, going."

The voice of the giant hunter sounded like that of a trumpet, yet there was that in its intonations that inspired the hearts of those two fair girls nestling at his side with hope, while it seemed to strike awe to the cowardly hearts of the outlaws.

"You're inclined to jest, Hurricane," said Mobile, endeavoring to smooth matters over.

"No; I'm in downright earnest—I am, by the gods of Olympus, Abel."

"Then," said Mobile, heating up with rage, "you will leave here at once."

"Well, the girls will have to go with me."

"They shall not!" hissed the infuriated outlaw, springing forward like a tiger to seize the girls. But one blow from the open hand of Hurricane sent

the villain to the other side of the room in a twinkling.

"Run out, gals, the boys are waitin' fur you at the door," said the hunter, and as the maidens hastened to obey his injunction, he braced himself against the wall to meet the attack of Mobile and his companions, who had now rushed to his—Mobile's—assistance.

The desperation with which the outlaws concentrated all their strength in the effort to overpower the Colossus, proved their own defeat, for, as they rushed madly upon him, he eluded their grasps and knocked them right and left, and in less than a minute he had all three of them floored. Then, springing across the floor, he blew out the light and glided from the room.

"Away, youngsters!" he exclaimed to the four young people who stood near, almost unconscious of what was going on around them, so deeply were they plunged into the silent raptures of love; "away, youngsters, and I'll cover your retreat."

The young people at once hurried away in the direction of the point where Ransom had left his horse, while Old Hurricane remained at the door of the cabin listening to the confusion within, his whole frame fairly convulsed with suppressed laughter. The outlaws, not knowing he had escaped from the room, had got to fighting among themselves, each one supposing the other was the hunter. But they soon discovered their ludicrous mistake; then, as they came charging from the cabin, Old Hurricane beat a hasty retreat around an angle of the building and stopped to listen.

"They've escaped, Mobile, they've escaped," he heard Thoms exclaim; "but, get out your bloodhounds and we'll trail them to perdition, but what we catch them! Hurry, Mobile, hurry; bring out your hounds while the trail is fresh!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE WRONG BODY.

OLD HURRICANE shuddered when he heard the deep bay of the bloodhounds as their brutal master brought them from the kennel. As near as he could judge by the sound, there were four of the dogs, and the number he knew was sufficient to endanger the lives of the young fugitives.

The old hunter knew there would be but little chance of throwing the hounds off the trail when once upon it, and so he concluded to join the fugitives, put them on their guard and prepare for the worst.

He turned and moved away into the thicket north of Mobile's cabin, hoping to intercept his friends by a circuitous route near the oak where he first met Ransom and Dolly.

Before he had reached the tree, however, the prolonged blast of a horn rung in startling notes out upon the air. The sound emanated from the rear of Mobile's cabin, and its import was at once made manifest to the old borderman when he heard it answered by a shrill whistle, coming from the top of the very knoll where he had seen a small party of Indians encamped.

He knew at once there was a preconcerted system of telegraphy existing between the outlaws and the Indians—that the former were calling their red allies to their assistance.

Arrived at the oak, he was greatly disappointed at not finding his friends there. He uttered a low whistle in hopes it would reach their ears and elicit a response that would direct him aright. There was no response, nor could he hear a sound, nor discover a sign by which he could determine the course taken by the fugitives. However, there was no time for speculation, and the natural presumption forced itself at once upon his mind that they had gone east toward the river, as had formerly been decided upon, and so he moved briskly away in that direction, expecting to come up with them. But an hour's walk found him still alone.

He was now several miles from the cabins of the

outlaws, and scarcely knowing what course to pursue next, he stopped to listen. A deep and unnatural silence brooded over the woodland, but this was suddenly succeeded by the sharp report of firearms, mingled with piercing screams, wild, savage yells, and fierce, brutal execrations.

These sounds came from not over sixty rods from where the old borderman then stood, and they smote like a death-knell upon his ears.

He listened. He could still hear the sound of excited voices, but nothing by which he could determine the fate of his friends; so, with his rifle at a trail, he crept forward through the woods, stopping occasionally to listen. He soon discovered that those excited voices were stationary, and as he drew closer and closer to them his practiced ear caught a sound like that of water dripping on dry leaves. He stopped, and pressing his ear to the earth, listened intently. He could still hear that slow, mysterious drop, drop. What did it mean? He crept silently forward and soon came to the edge of a little moonlit glade, on the margin of which he halted.

Before him lay an old log, and across this lay the half-nude form of an Indian warrior. He was dead, and from a wound in the head drops of blood were falling on a pile of dry leaves collected by the log.

The mystery stood explained, and the old borderman pushed boldly out into the glade and examined the body. He recognized the Indian by his enormous size, being fully as large as the hunter himself, as a notorious war-chief called Strong-Arm, and leader of the party he had seen encamped on the knoll near Mobile's cabin.

He knew at once that this very spot was where his friends had been overtaken, and that Strong-Arm had been slain in the conflict that ensued. But the voices—now toned down—that he could hear were a few rods further south, and so he crept on and came to a halt within ear-shot of them. He heard a rough, rasping voice—which he readily detected as that of the infamous Abel Mobile—saying:

"Yes, my little ladies, you've got yourselves into a purty muss by lovin' off with these two young scamps, who'll hang for their part in the game."

From this Hurricane gleaned that both the maidens and their lovers had been recaptured.

"And now, Thoms," he heard Mobile continue, "as these little runaways 'll not be safe at my cabin while that infernal big Hurricane goes unhung, we'll trot 'em right down to Spain."

"That's the place for 'keeps,'" Thoms exclaimed.

Mobile continued:

"Now, I'll run back home with these 'ere hounds, and bring a couple o' ponies to take the runaways on, fur it'll be a long walk fur the likes o' them, tho' I'll warrant they'd 'a' walked to Halifax with these young freebooters."

"All right, Abel," Thoms responded; "we'll wait fur you at the Two Oaks. You see, we've got to do a little hanging before we git rid of these two gal-thieves, and the Two Oaks, you know, is where sich things are done."

"That's the talk, Cale Thoms," replied Mobile; "don't let the rascals pester us any furdur, but hang 'em, cuss 'em, hang 'em."

"What will you do with Strong-Arm's carcass, Ingins?" Thoms now inquired of the four Indians that stood over Harry and Ransom with drawn tomahawks.

"We take body 'long," one of the Indians replied. "Strong-Arm great war-chief—chief and friends be angry if no take body to village—make litter—carry body on."

"Wal, it's no use to try to persuade 'em out o' takin' the body," Mobile said; "so now, Thoms, you and Hupp will have to look sharp. It will take all four o' the Ingins to tote the carcass o' Strong-Arm, and you'll have to take charge o' that pair o' young ladies and brace of gal-thieves. Mebby I'll be at the Two Oaks in time to help boost the gentlemen up."

"And I may be there, too, my dear Abel Mobile,"

mused Old Hurricane, as the outlaw turned and started on his return to his cabin with his hounds.

I will here remark that the dogs had not been turned loose upon the fugitives' trail, else the result would have been serious. They had been held in check by their master, who, with his companions, followed at their heels at a rapid pace; and when the fugitives were overtaken, the fierce brutes were held back by the leash.

The Indians made a litter out of two blankets and two strong poles, and placing the body of their dead chief thereon, started, in company with the captives and outlaws, toward the Two Oaks. After a steady march for nearly an hour the party came to a halt.

They were at the Two Oaks.

Leaving the captives in charge of the four savages, Thoms and Hupp proceeded to strike a fire under the two oaks. This they soon accomplished, and the great spreading boughs of the two gnarled oaks, and the smooth, grassy sward beneath, were lit up with a bright glow.

The young surveyor and Boy Ranger were at once lashed to one of the oaks, while the maidens were tied to a small sapling.

The outlaws now turned upon the young men, and began taunting them with the most heartless, provoking language they could command. But not an expression of fear became visible upon the prisoners' brows. On the contrary, a look of cool, calm defiance met the gaze of their captors' eyes.

"Oh, my young hearties!" the brutal Hupp at last exclaimed, "we'll soon take the temper outen you!"

"Do your worst, you bloated wretch," replied the Boy Ranger, with a scornful flash of the eyes; "we will have the consolation of knowing while we do live that you'll get your dues at the hands of your master, the devil."

"Frogfoot!" exclaimed the outlaw, enraged by the youth's words, "bring me the lariat attached to that saddle, and I'll string this impudent young rascal to one o' these limbs in a jiffy!"

The Indian brought the lariat, one end of which Hupp at once adjusted around the young ranger's neck.

Little Dolly seeing these preparations for the execution of her lover, began begging in a wild, despairing voice, for the robbers to spare his life. But the unnatural monsters only laughed at her appeals, and went on with the preparations for the execution. Dolly now burst forth in wild, frantic sobs and cries that rung tremulously through the forest like the wail of a lost spirit.

"Happ!" exclaimed Thoms, indignantly, "stop that little wench's mouth. Her wildcat screams might bring that skulkin' big giant, Old Hurricane, upon us."

"Humph!" exclaimed Hupp, "I should think six of us could manage him, but"—turning to Dolly—"see here, little woman, you must hush this noise. I'll stop your mouth with a kiss, so I will."

"Fiend, do not come near me!" she cried, fiercely, her eyes flashing with deadly scorn. "If you touch me, I pray Heaven will strike you dead!"

"Now I will have a kiss," the burly ruffian said, advancing and taking the pretty, pale face of the maiden between his hard palms and stooping to kiss her.

But before he had accomplished his insulting design, he started back, while a cry of agony wailed from his lips. With both hands he began clutching wildly at his breast, and from between his fingers, his friends, as well as the captives, saw a tiny stream of blood, spurting in crimson jets.

"Oh, God, I'm killed!" groaned the wretch, and staggering to and fro in vain attempts to keep his feet to the last, he finally fell like a log to the earth.

His friends ran to his side and found he was dead! He had been stabbed in the breast, with a broad-bladed knife. But who had dealt the blow? Was it the vengeance of Heaven invoked by Dolly?

A look of terror settled upon the features of

Thoms and the warriors. Even the captives felt a shudder creep over them.

But their consternation was of short duration, for out from the shadow of the trees sprung old Hurricane, and with a roar like that of a lion, he charged upon the terrified enemy.

"Down, down to the brimstone pit!" he roared, as he struck right and left; "down, you essence of sin! Whoop! whoop! hoof it, you cowardly guttersnipe."

The last words were directed to Thoms, who, seeing his savage friends knocked in every direction, had turned and sought safety by flight into the forest.

The savages had been taken completely by surprise, and before they could recover from their terror in time to draw a weapon, the old hunter's iron right fist and heavy knife had sent them to earth, and the next moment Harry Dudley and the Boy Ranger were free.

Here let us drop the curtain over the scene that followed.

Ten minutes later Old Hurricane, followed by the young surveyor, the Boy Ranger, and the two fair maidens—the latter mounted upon the youth's horse—were making their way eastward through the forest.

And still ten minutes later Abel Mobile, with two led horses, rode into the circle of light beneath the spreading branches of the Two Oaks.

"Gone!" exclaimed the ruffian, with a chuckle of satisfaction; "but I see they've stretched the gal-thieves in good order, and oh! sweet glory! if Old Hurricane was only hanging there too—Furies!"

As he had entered the radius of light, he had caught sight of two persons hanging from a limb of one of the oaks, and the first impression was, of course, that Thoms and his companions had hung the young ranger and surveyor, and they had pushed on; but a second glance told him that the two bodies hanging between heaven and earth were those of his red allies—Indians!

And a quick glance around him discovered to him the body of the outlaw, Jack Hupp, lying where it had fallen under the fatal blow of Old Hurricane.

Filled with a sudden terror, the outlaw turned his animal's head and galloped away into the then inviting shadows of the woods, pursued by the phantom of vengeance.

CHAPTER XII.

OUR FLAG IS THERE!

WE pass over a period of three days and again take up the thread of our story.

In a little valley compassed on three sides by tall, wooded bluffs, and on the fourth side by the Des Moines river, the claim-stakers had erected a little defense, which, after the spirit of their forefathers, they named Fort Defiance. The topographical location of the defense had been well considered in view of the natural advantages it afforded. The valley was treeless and shrubless, and unbroken by hills or depressions on its surface. It was of about thirty acres in extent, and shaped like a crescent, the river defining the face or straight line.

A little stream found its way across the plain and poured its waters into the river. It was one of those remarkable streams frequently met with upon the prairies of the West, resembling more an artificial channel than a natural creek.

The claim-stakers had, with a view to an ample supply of water, erected their little fort, so that this creek, traversing the plain, flowed directly through the inclosure, the basement of the latter resting almost upon the water's surface.

In one corner of the fort a separate apartment had been made for the accommodation of Dora and Dolly, whom Old Hurricane had placed under the protection of the little band, they having reached the camp of the claim-stakers in safety on that same eventful night which had witnessed the drama at the Two Oaks.

During the construction of the fort, Wild Dick, the

Dumb Spy, had kept the Indians and robbers away by artifice, so skillfully played that his purposes were never suspected. In the mean time he had kept his friends posted as to the movements of the enemy.

On the second night after the completion of the fort, Dick made his appearance there, with information that put the claim-stakers in a state of great uneasiness.

"The devil's to pay, Cap," he said, in reply to a question from Ross-grove; "the robbers and red-skins have diskivered your fort, and they're burnin' with rage and vengeance. Old Black-Hawk can't do anything with his rebellious warriors—the robbers hev got the upper hand of him. They're goin' to attack the fort, and they've sent me out to make a reconnaissance—me, ha! ha! ha!"

"How soon do they propose to make the attack?"

"Not afore to-morrow night. Then look out, boys, fur they're in 'arnest. Ole Abe Mobile has found out his gals, as he calls 'em, are here, and him and Cale Thoms swear they'll bring down the heavens but what they'll have 'em; and you, Hurricane—why, they've been figurin' three days as how they'd punish you fur your interference at the Two Oaks."

"Ho! ho! ho!" roared Old Hurricane. "I s'pect they are a leetle frothy, but, when they git 'em girls, it'll be when this old carcass is cold."

"What else have you to report, Dick?" asked Ross-grove.

"Wal, the robbers are havin' a good deal of trouble," said Dick, "fur, besides you fellers, Scarlet Death is pepperin' a few of their men."

At mention of this name a perceptible movement agitated the party, for they had all witnessed enough of that mysterious Demon's work to fill them with no little wonder and fear, bordering on superstition.

"Have they any idea who or what the Demon is?" asked Harry Dudley.

"Not in the least. Howsumever, they think he can be destroyed, and big efforts are bein' made to that effect."

"Bah!" exclaimed Noisy Nat, "they mou't as well try to hold a shadder or catch a spirit, for I believe—and I'm not superstitious, boys, not by a long shot—I believe the Demon's an invisible avengin' angel, put here by the will o' Heaven."

"Wal, not changin' the subject, boys," said Dick, "I've suthin' else to tell you. I've found the treasure-house of the outlaws."

"Indeed?"

"Yas, and it's not over a mile from here."

"Anything in it?"

"It's chuck full o' boxes, big and little, filled with everything imaginable. I tell ye them Disputers are a tough set o' larks, and carry on their piracy on a wholesale scale. I've learned that Reckless Ralph, the robber chief, owns a little stern-wheel steamer on the Missasip' that plies atwixt St. Louey and Bloomfield as an honest craft, but the fact is, whenever that steamer gits a cargo o' valuable goods, the river pirates stops the boat and boards it, and, after takin' all they can find wuth takin' they let the boat go on, and the pirates hussel the goods right up here to their secret cave. Don't you see into that river piracy business that's defied the powers so long?"

"It looks a leetle probable," said Hurricane.

"Yes, and we may reap a double reward from our adventures yet," said Captain Ross-grove.

"That's true, Cap," said Dick, "and as the enemy are likely to lay siege to your fort, I'd advise you to lay in a supply of ammunition from their store while you can."

"Have they ammunition concealed in the cavern of which you speak?"

"Yes, everything, Cap, everything from beginnin' to end; includin' silk goods, rich carpets, silverware and jewelry wuth thousands and thousands."

"Yes, we ought to have, and I think will have a supply of ammunition," said Ross-grove, "and if the girls are in need of anything in the way of clothing,

they shall have it. It's true the goods are no more ours than the outlaws', but necessity will obligate the confiscation, and it may be a partial help toward bringing those robbers to justice."

"That's the gospel, John," said Old Hurricane, "and you app'int a party to go after the things, and be sure and app'int me one of them, for I'm good on totin' things—ekal to a mule."

"Very well, I'll appoint you for one; now select your own crowd and go for the treasure cave," said Rossgrove.

"Wal, this is conferrin' undesarved honors on me, Cap; but I'll jist name Wild Dick, the Boy Ranger, and Harry Dudley to go with me, and the rest of you can defend the fort and them little angels."

The matter being thus settled, the four took their departure from the fort, Wild Dick leading the way.

An hour later found them in the secret cavern, among the stolen goods of the outlaws. A light being prepared, it revealed to their eyes a promiscuous heap of boxes, bundles, barrels and kegs.

Placing one of their number on guard at the entrance of the cave, the others proceeded to examine the contents of the boxes. Old Hurricane, anxious for Dolly and Dora's comfort, secured a large quantity of such things as he thought could be made useful by them in furnishing their wardrobe and apartments. The others secured a goodly quantity of ammunition, and then, having concealed all traces of their work as well as they could, they took their departure for the fort.

Arrived there in safety, Old Hurricane was admitted to Dora and Dolly's room with the goods he had brought for them. Depositing the bundle on the floor, he said:

"There, children, are some fix-ups for you."

"Thank you, Uncle Hurricane, for being so considerate of our comfort," said Dora, as the old borderman left the room.

The maidens' womanly curiosity to know what the bundle contained was at once aroused, and they proceeded to open it.

The first thing that met their eyes was a roll of rich carpeting, over which they had a hearty laugh as they compared it with their surroundings. They found, also, some rolls of various-colored silks, some woolen and cotton fabrics, needles, threads, combs, and even some fancy jewelry.

"I declare, Dora," said the vivacious little Dolly, with a merry laugh, "Uncle Hurricane has been quite considerate of our welfare and comfort."

"Yes, so far as silks are concerned, although they will be of nouse whatever to us."

"Why, yes they will, Dora. I was just wishing for something of the kind. You see, we have a part to perform in the defense of Fort Defiance. We are all a little band of American patriots, and yet we have nothing by which a foe might know under what flags we are fighting."

"Oh, Dolly, you little chit! I see what you are driving at now. I would never have thought of such a thing. So let's do it. We have everything here that would be desired to accomplish the object, and then it will be such a pleasant surprise to the men."

"But we will have to let one or two into our secret," said Dolly.

"Yes; let it be the two that stand guard to-morrow night."

"Very well, sweet sister; but we can begin our work at once," said Dolly, and thus we will leave them for the time being.

After having imparted all the information of which he was possessed concerning the robbers, Wild Dick took his departure for Spain.

Sentinels had been posted soon after nightfall, but the night passed quietly away.

All were astir early the following morning, and the day was passed in strengthening the little fort for the attack threatened the coming night.

During the day the maidens learned from Captain Rossgrove that Old Hurricane and Harry Dudley

would stand guard the coming night, and so they embraced the first opportunity of letting them into their little secret. The old borderman was greatly taken with the spirit of the fair girls' enterprise, and pledged his assistance.

The day wore away, and the shadows of night again infolded the valley. The sentinels took their post, while the others retired to their quarters to rest and sleep.

As the hours passed, the moon came up, flooding the landscape with its mellow radiance; but dark clouds that were floating across the face of the heavens crossed its disk ever and anon, making checkers of light and shadow on the earth.

The men in their shelter slept soundly, all unconscious of what was going on around them. However, as the hours wore on, they were all suddenly startled from their slumber by the sound of voices.

"What's up?" questioned Captain Rossgrove, starting from his sleep.

"Hark! Listen, captain. Some one is singing—it's the girls; Dora and Dolly, and other voices accompany them—it's the voices of Old Hurricane and Harry Dudley. Harkee!"

They sat still, apparently enraptured by the sweet seductive notes as they thrilled out in melodious strains upon the air, and every one bent his ear to catch the words:

"Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming,

Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the
perilous fight,

O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly
streaming," etc.

As if actuated by a single impulse, the men sprung from their couches and rushed out to where the singers were standing. A light breeze fanned their cheeks as they entered the open court, and something like the soft rustle of a great wing above them fell upon their ears. They lifted their eyes upward, and just then the moon came out from behind a cloud, and showed them a beautiful flag—the stars and stripes—floating gracefully out in rippling folds from a tall pole around which the singers stood.

And this was the maidens' surprise—made by their own hands of the silk brought by Hurricane from the robbers' treasure cave.

The sight of the dear old flag was magical.

Well done Dora and Dolly! You have performed a noble part; you have infused new life into the little band of heroes, and nerved them for the ordeal so soon to come.

The last words had scarcely died upon the singers' lips when there arose a sound—

"As if all the fiends from heaven that fell
Had pealed the banner-cry of hell."

It was the horrifying yell of the Indians and outlaws that had burst from the shadows along the base of the bluffs, and now came pouring in a living stream across the plain.

"To arms, boys!" shouted Rossgrove, "and fight like men for your lives."

"Ay, ay, captain!" added the old hunter; "and by the gods of Olympus yonder flag must not be disgraced, nor those whose fairy hands made it!—whoop! whoop! hurrah! ye screechin' fiends, come on—right into the jaws of death, and—"

The rest of the defiant words were lost in the thunderous crash of firearms that now rent the morning air in wild, startling echoes.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STIRRING TIME.

FULLY a hundred Indians and robbers, led by the notorious Reckless Ralph, had assaulted the little fort of the claim-stakers, and their great superiority of numbers was expected to insure an easy victory; so

with yell and scream they came charging pell-mell across the plain. But a deadly fire was poured into their ranks from the loops of the little fort, causing them to recoil for a moment in consternation. But they rallied again and pressed upon the fort, only to recoil before another withering volley of the claim-stakers' rifles.

"If we can hold out till daylight," said Ross Grove, "we will have no trouble in keeping them off."

"True, John," replied Hurricane; "but look a-here: what do you think's the reason Wild Dick didn't give the agreed-on signal?"

"Circumstances over which I had no control," said a voice behind them, and turning, they stood face to face with Wild Dick.

"By cracky!" exclaimed Hurricane; "where'd you come from, man?"

"And who let you into the fort?" asked Ross Grove.

"I waded this creek to the walls o' the fort, then I dived under the wall and come up on the inside; and you'll have to look sharp or the red-skins will avail themselves o' the same means."

"That's all very true, Dick," said Ross Grove, "and we will not forget to keep a watch out for such dangers hereafter—ah! here they come again! To your posts, boys, to your posts!"

The enemy had formed under the shadows of the bluffs, and came charging down upon the little fortification again.

A deadly fire met them which caused great havoc in their ranks, and compelled them to seek safety in the woods near by.

The attack was not renewed during that night and the claim-stakers remained unmolested.

Daylight at last dawned, and from the distant bluffs the defeated robbers and red-skins saw the flag of the claim-stakers floating proudly and gracefully in the morning air.

Wild Dick remained with his friends until after daylight, and when on the eve of taking his departure, Captain Ross Grove drew him aside, and said:

"Dick, I have a little favor to ask of you."

"Name it, captain, name it."

Ross Grove drew from his pocket a picture, and handing it to Dick, said:

"Take a good look at that, and when you return from the Dispute, tell me whether you have seen a woman there, either a captive or free, that looks like that picture."

"I'll do it, Cap, with all my heart," said Dick, "but I sw'ar that's an orful purty face in this picture. Is she any relation to you, Cap?"

"No difference, Dick, no difference now. I will tell you all about it when you report to me your discovery."

"All hunky, Cap," responded Dick.

At this juncture the latter's brother, Witless Seth, made his appearance, and with his fingers began a conversation. For several minutes they conversed in their silent language, the violent gesticulations of the mute betraying great emotion.

At length Wild Dick took his departure for Spain on his mission in behalf of Captain Ross Grove.

The day wore slowly away. The defeat of the foe did not give the claim-stakers entire ease of mind, for they knew they would resort to some new demonstration to dislodge them. Not a sign of the enemy was seen during the day, but toward evening a sound like the ring of an ax came from over among the wooded hills.

"Some one's choppin' over thar, captain," said Old Hurricane, with an ominous shake of the head. "The cunnin' varlets have somethin' new in their heads; I'm afeard they're fixin' up somethin' to give us trouble to-night. But let 'em come; if they want fire and brimstun, let 'em come!"

Night again infolded the land. The sky was clear, and although the moon was not up, the starlight rendered objects quite distinct.

Old Hurricane, under cover of the darkness, made a reconnaissance along the extremities of the plain. He found a number of Indians and robbers camped

to the south of the fort, and from their presence there, and the activity that prevailed among them, it was quite evident that they intended another attack on Fort Defiance.

Returning to the fort, the scout reported his discoveries, and suggested measures of defense.

Inasmuch as they expected an early attack, the claim-stakers did not retire, but patrolled the fort, rifles in hand.

Noisy Nat and Ethan Hamilton were posted as sentinels, although all were on the watch. Even Witless Seth, the mute, seemed to have had his fears aroused by something more than usual, and at any time he could be seen flitting hither and thither through the fort like a shadow.

Suddenly, with his face betraying the wildest fear and excitement, he rushed up to where Captain Ross Grove and Old Hurricane stood conversing, and began gesticulating in a quick, violent manner. The old hunter and his companion, failing to comprehend his wants, made a movement signifying their readiness to follow him.

The mute hastily led the way across the inclosure, and on the edge of the little stream that found its way directly through the fort he stopped, and pointed down at the water.

Bending their gaze in the direction thus indicated, they were not a little surprised to see a long bass-wood log lying upon the surface of the stream. It had been recently placed there—since dark, in fact, and judging from its exterior appearance it was hollow.

How it had come there was a profound mystery to the captain.

Seeing Old Hurricane betrayed some silent emotion at sight of the mysterious log, he—the captain—was on the eve of speaking to him, when the hunter turned and said, in a low tone:

"John, thar's mischief brewin'."

"Why do you think so?" asked the captain.

"That log in the channel yonder has been forced under the lower side of the fort by some human agency. It never drifted in here. You remember we heard a choppin' goin' on over 'mong the bluffs to-day? Now, that log, and the Lord only knows how many more, is what they war cuttin'. You see, John, that log is holler as a shell, and I opine thar's holes cut on the under side of the log, and if so, my ha'r on't, thar's an Injin's head in every hole!"

"What! Indians in that log?"

"Thar heads are, while their bodies are under the log in the water."

"If such is the case, there can't possibly be very many savages there."

"No, but they're waitin' fur another logful to come. That's only my 'pinion, John, fur it's an ole trick of the red-skins. I've see'd it afore, John."

"Well, I shall hasten to call the attention of the boys to the fact, and have them prepared for the worst."

"Do so, John, and I'll look to other things."

The two separated. Hurricane went to the west side of the fort where the creek entered the inclosure. To his surprise, he found Witless Seth there, busily engaged in filling up the channel with large stones that had been gathered into the fort for other purposes. His proceedings met the approval of the old hunter, who at once lent his assistance to the work; and they soon had the channel blocked so that no further entrances could be made from this point.

When this was accomplished, the old hunter went back and found Ross Grove and his men drawn up in line, ready to receive the cunning foe.

"I'll tell you, John," said the borderman, addressing Ross Grove in a whisper; "if thar's any Ingins in that log, they're waitin' for friends to jine 'em. But they'll not do it in a holler log, for the mute and me blockaded the channel. So we've got the gentry 'n a trap, instead of them trappin' us. And now fur some fun, boys, and perchance a leetle fightin' I'm goin' to flip one eend of that log outen the water,

and see what's under it. You fellers all be red-dy to spot your man, in case my suspicions are correct."

As he concluded, the old hunter turned and advanced to the edge of the creek. Then, stooping over, he caught hold of one end of the mysterious log and raised it quickly from the water. Simultaneous with this act, a dozen rifles were raised to as many shoulders.

"A water-haul, by the gods of Olympus!" burst in tones of apparent disappointment from the hunter's lips, as he dropped the log back in the water. Not the sign of a savage was seen, although there were a number of large holes freshly cut on the under side of the log.

"I can't see into it, John," the hunter said, not a little perplexed; "that log never came here of its own accord, never. It'd never had the power to dive under the wall of the fort like somethin' possessed of reason. It may have been some trick jist to test our vigilance, for the cunnin' devils are as tricky as Satan hisself."

"They may have entered the fort by means of the log, as you suspected at first, and have crept out and concealed themselves among the shadows within the fort," said Ross-grove.

"Hardly possible, Cap, yet it might not be amiss with the caution of a borderman to search the premises."

"Then, boys," said Ross-grove to his friends, "search every nook and shadow for concealed foes."

The men turned away and began the search. Hurricane and Ross-grove still maintained their position by the creek, conversing in a subdued tone.

At length a deep silence was imposed upon them by a sound like that which would be produced by a person drumming on a log with his fingers. It seemed to issue from the water at one end of the strange log. It lasted for only a moment, then there was an interval of silence, immediately succeeded by the same sound, which seemed to pass quickly from one end of the log to the other, then cease again.

"I sw'ar to gracious, John!" exclaimed Old Hurricane, "that noise is in that infernal log. It must be haunted, John, for didn't I lift one end clear outen the water? And didn't I see the holes on the under side whar Ingin heads had ort to have been? Didn't I see all this, John, plain as I see you?"

"Perhaps, Hurricane," said Ross-grove, "the moment you took hold of the log, the cunning knaves divined your intention, or overheard our conversation, and, drawing their heads from those holes, dove under the water, where they remained until you dropped the log back; and during the noise consequent upon the fall of the log, the savages may have resumed their cunning covert."

"My God, John! Why, in Heaven's name, didn't you speak your mind afore this? It's onpossible for one mind to conceive everything, and—"

He did not finish the sentence. There was a sharp rap upon the mysterious log, succeeded by a fluttering in the water under it. A dozen heads, followed by naked, bronzed shoulders and nude forms, appeared above the grassy borders of the channel, with a scream that thrilled in startling echoes upon the air; a dozen powerful savages leaped from the creek, and sprung with the fury of demons toward our friends.

And foremost among them was that implacable enemy and rival of Old Hurricane, the giant warrior, *Big-Foot*!

CHAPTER XIV.

"CHEEK BY JOWL."

As the savages arose from the creek, their yells warned the claim-stakers of their peril, and although taken by surprise, their actions of defense were made as promptly as though they had been expecting this very movement of the foe. Almost instantly a dozen rifles poured their deadly contents into the ranks of the savages, laying several of their number dead. But with wild impetuosity, the survivors pressed to

the conflict, with that desperation of men who know they must win or die. They were armed with but a single weapon—the deadly tomahawk. These they dare not throw, through a fear of their inability to recover them in the dark, and so they were compelled to press close upon the whites to engage them. But the latter readily saw where their danger lay, and averted the blows intended for their heads by a rapid retreat, in the meantime firing with their pistols—when their rifles had been emptied—upon the advancing foe.

Old Hurricane had no sooner discovered the presence of his giant foe, *Big-Foot*, than with a leap, like that of a tiger, he sprung at him, planting his huge fist between his eyes with such terrific force that the red-skin dropped his tomahawk and went down like a log. But, quick as a flash he was upon his feet and grappling hand-to-hand with his adversary.

And now began a struggle that baffles description, for their movements were so swift and violent, and their positions shifted so rapidly, that the eye could not follow them. Away across the arena they whirled and spun like a pair of giddy waltzers, neither uttering a sound, but struggling in that deadly silence which both had maintained in a conflict of a few nights previous.

Meanwhile, the conflict in another part of the fort had assumed a far different character. The claim-stakers had routed the savages, who were running hither and thither like frightened deer, endeavoring to find an egress from the fort.

Big-Foot caught sight of his defeated and fleeing friends, and his own fears at once became aroused. He knew assistance would soon come to the hunter. There was no alternative but to seek safety in flight, and settle the deadly feud between him and the old hunter at another time. So, throwing every energy into the effort, he tore himself from the clutches of his antagonist, and, with a defiant shout, bounded away across the fort.

Old Hurricane gave chase at a speed that threatened the recapture of the savage. The latter, however, reached the wall of the fort, and, bounding up a rude pair of stone steps, that had been constructed for the use of the sentinels, he glanced back over his shoulder like a stag at bay, then uttered a defiant yell and made a desperate leap over the parapet for the ground on the outside. But, just as he was sinking to a level with the top of the wall, Old Hurricane, who was literally at the Indian's heels, reached forward and grasped the savage by the scalp-lock. The weight of the descending giant proved too much for the hunter, who was thrown off his balance and jerked headlong over the top of the wall, to fall upon the red-skin.

Seeing this mishap of the hunter, the men hastened to his assistance. As they threw open their ports, they were not a little surprised to see a number of savages rush up from behind the river-bank, toward the two struggling foes.

"Quick, boys, fire upon them," cried Ross-grove, "or our friend will be slain!"

The men quickly fired upon the advancing foes, causing them to fall back behind the shelter of the river-bank.

The claim-stakers now endeavored to get outside to the assistance of the hunter, but a broadside from the enemy intrenched behind the river-bank warned them to keep within their breastworks.

"By heavens, boys, we're in a dilemma!" cried young Kendall, the Boy Ranger; "we dare not go out to the assistance of our friend, but, in the meantime, we have the consolation of knowing the red-skins dare not venture out to help their friend. So Hurricane and *Big-Foot* for it, and I'll bet on the hunter."

All relapsed into silence and listened. They could hear the two giants struggling at the foot of the wall on the outside. Dull sodden blows, cries, yells and execrations filled the air. These gradually grew feebler and fainter, until, at length, all sounds of the

struggle were hushed. The conflict had ceased; who was the victor?

The claim-stakers peered out at the loopholes. They saw two dark forms lying in the grass about ten feet apart, but they were motionless.

Rossgrove, thinking he might have only been wounded, called Old Hurricane by name. But there was no response—no movement of either of the motionless forms.

A moment later Dora and Dolly came running, with affright, to where the party stood.

"Oh!" cried Dolly, "the hunter, Noisy Nat, is dying out yonder!"

Each one noticed now, for the first time, that Nat was missing.

"Come, one of you, and let us look to Nat. The others remain here and watch that the savages behind the bank do not approach and scalp our friend Hurricane."

Rossgrove and young Kendall were conducted by the maidens to where Noisy Nat had fallen under the blow of a savage. The captain soon discovered, to his great joy, that the hunter had only been stricken unconscious, and even then showed signs of returning life.

As soon as Nat was able to speak, he started up, and gazing around him like one bewildered, exclaimed:

"Where is it?—where is that—that Demon, Scarlet Death?"

"Your mind is confused, Nat. There has been no Demon about, unless you mean the Indians, which is nearly the same."

"No, captain," persisted the hunter; "I know what I'm talkin' about. I *did* see a Demon. I see'd him leap into the fort. I see'd his horns and cloven hoofs—yes, I know it was Scarlet Death. I see'd him open his mouth and balls of fire shoot out among the red-skins. I *know* it was the Demon, and I know you can find his mark on some o' them dead Injuns. Go look, captain, jist for my satisfaction."

"I'll do so, Nat," replied the captain, turning away with a smile on his face, and taking the lantern from Dora's hand, he moved away toward the bodies of the slain savages.

He came to where five of the savages had fallen near each other. He held the lantern down so that its rays streamed across one of their faces. He started, and a cry of surprise burst from his lips. Upon the temple of the warrior he saw the death-mark of the terrible and mysterious Scarlet Death!

"By Heaven! Nat is right; here *is* the Demon's mark, as I live!"

"I told you I weren't outen my head, captain." Rossgrove turned at the sound of the voice. Nat had risen to his feet and followed him.

"Ay, you are better, Nat," the captain said, a little confused; "but see here; did you actually see what you just described to me?"

"I did, captain." "But what became of the Demon after the fight?" asked the captain, growing more and more confused and mystified.

"I don't know, captain. I got that jolt on the head that sent me flunkin' to taw 'bout the time the Demon fust made its appearance."

"This is a little strange—yea, mysterious. Were it not for the Demon's mark before my eyes, I would believe you received that blow on the head a second *before* the Demon appeared, or why would not some of the rest have seen the same?"

"Can't say, captain, but it's a gospel fact. I, Nathaniel Taylor, did see the Demon of the Des Moines and I'm the fust that ever sot eyes onto it."

The two next searched for the tracks of the Demon, but the ground being covered with a mat of trodden grass, no impressions were left upon it.

There was something decidedly strange about this mysterious avenger. Captain Rossgrove's mind was entirely free of superstitious bias, yet, here was something well calculated to engender mystery and wonder in the most skeptical mind.

However much the captain's mind may have been worked up by the mystery, all soon became forgotten in the interest centered on the fate of Old Hurricane.

From the port-holes our friends now gazed out. They saw the body of Old Hurricane and that of Big-Foot lying upon the earth apparently stark and stiff. But it was readily seen that the distance intervening between their bodies *was not half so great as when they were first discovered!* The foes were gradually approaching each other. There was no doubt of this, and Rossgrove had decided to fire at the body of Big-Foot, when Witless Seth, who had been gazing out at one of the port-holes, beckoned him to his side, and motioned to look out of the loop in a certain direction.

The captain complied with the mute's request and he was not a little surprised to see a large, fine-looking horse, with bridle and saddle upon it, coming directly from the west in a course that would leave the fort scarcely a rod to the north. No one was visible about it, but it was quite evident that its movements were directed by the impulse of an invisible rider.

Captain Rossgrove was at quite a loss to know the meaning of the animal's appearance there, and so he called Noisy Nat for counsel.

The horse came on with cautious step, and head erect, as if he scented danger. He was moving directly toward the motionless figures of Old Hurricane and Big-Foot, and at sight of them he shied slightly, bringing his rider in plain view; but before our friends could fire, the horse had been reined back into its former course and urged forward.

It was finally permitted to stop directly *between* the bodies of the two giant foes, and then our friends saw the cunning rider slip to the ground.

"I see into it, now," said Noisy Nat; "that infernal booger has come to help Big-Foot away, or else to get Hurricane's scalp— Ah! looky, Cap, they must think we're a pack o' condemned fools!"

The last remark was induced by seeing Big-Foot move, so they knew he was only wounded, and by some means or other it had become known to his friends, who had conceived the idea of sending the horse there to help him away.

Our friends kept a close watch on the savage giant. All of a sudden they saw him leap to his feet and prepare to spring upon the animal's back; and at the same instant they were not a little amazed to see Old Hurricane spring nimbly to his feet, and turn as if to mount the horse, also.

The two foes stood face to face with the animal between them. Their eyes met above the horse's back. Quick as the lightning's flash, the right hand or each shot across the saddle's seat, and the fingers clasped with a fearful gripe in each other's long-coveted scalp-locks.

A yell of vengeance burst from the savage's lips. It was answered by a shout of derision—emphasized by a tug at the Indian's hair—from the lips of Old Hurricane.

Their yells frightened the horse, and, with a wild snort, it whirled around and dashed away at a thunderous speed over the plain, the two deadly, relentless foes dangling, as it were, cheek by jowl, at his sides.

No effort of the frantic beast could break the petrified grasp of the deadly enemies—no effort could slide them off over his back, for their arms lay pressed in the deep saddle, and held there by their united weights.

In this manner they were dragged away into the gloom of the distance—away to an unknown fate!

CHAPTER XV.

CAMILLA'S PRISON.

LET us now follow the Dumb Spy back to Spain again.

In accordance with his brother Seth's daily habits, Wild Dick lingered about in the woods until dark,

then made his way into the settlement and to his quarters in the rear of the court-room.

He threw himself upon his couch and endeavored to gain a few hours' sleep and rest that his overworked body and mind stood in need of. He soon fell asleep, and slept soundly for hours, but he was at length awakened by the sound of voices in the adjoining apartment, and rising to a sitting posture, he applied his ear to the crack in the wall made for his especial eavesdropping purposes.

He heard the voices of Reckless Ralph and Cale Thoms in stormy rage. They had just returned from the vicinity of Fort Defiance, where they had sustained another defeat by the claim-stakers.

"I tell you, captain," he heard Thoms say, "we have got to call on the United States dragoons to drive them fellers off the Black-Hawk Purchase. You know, last summer, when them fellows from Illinois came on to the Purchase and made their claims, we reported them to the authorities. And what was the consequence? Why, a company of dragoons came on and drove them off and burnt their cabins."

"This case is different, Thoms," replied Reckless Ralph. "Rossgrove's party has old Black-Hawk's permit, on certain conditions, to locate claims on the Purchase, and so they couldn't be held amenable to the terms of the treaty. *Our safety depends solely on the secret extermination of the claim-stakers!*"

"True, judge, true," responded Thoms; "it's nothin' like havin' a long head, but I *do* want to pay some of them fellers for that affair at the Two Oaks, besides them girls of Abel Mobile's must be rescued, if taken dead!"

"You're growing desperate, lieutenant," laughed the robber chief, "and be careful that you don't run your head into the halter."

"Yes, Judge," retorted Thoms, "*you* can appreciate the old saying, that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. *You're got your bird caged, and are easy.*"

Dick started slightly on hearing these last words. There was a latent meaning in them which he thought might develop into something tangible, so he listened intently to catch every word.

"Well, Thoms," he heard Reckless Ralph say, after a moment's pause, "we have got to make another attack on these fellows to-morrow night, and if we should fail again, we will have to unearth that old war-dog in Gibben's cellar, and try them with that. Roop says he believes there have been intruders in the treasure-vault. If so, these claim-locaters may have found the cave, and if they're not put out of the way soon *they* may bring dragoons onto us, and the cave and its goods would be strong evidence against us. Yes, Thoms, we must exterminate the whole gang!"

"But, wouldn't the death of Rossgrove prove detrimental to your other plans?" questioned Thoms.

"Not in the least. The sooner he is dead the better, for should he once get wind of what I have in Spain, he'd bring down the heavens but what he would get her back."

"By cracky!" mused Wild Dick, when he had heard this, "then the original of the captain's picture is in Spain a prisoner!"

"Suppose, Judge," he heard Thoms say, "you were to be questioned pretty closely about your prisoner by some one that doesn't understand the ropes?"

"Why, I'd tell them the truth *of course!* I'd tell them she is my daughter who persisted in running away from the parental roof, and that I was compelled to lock her up."

"That tells the story," mused the Dumb Spy, "and by—"

At this juncture there came a hasty footstep into the court-room, and an excited voice exclaimed:

"Captain, captain, the guard at your daughter's prison-door is lying dead, and Scarlet Death, the Demon has slain him!"

An oath burst from the profane lips of Reckless Ralph.

"Has she—my daughter I mean—escaped?"

"No—guess not, captain; her door's locked."

The robber-chief went storming out of the court-room, and took his way through the village, closely followed and watched by the Dumb Spy.

Raft soon came to the foot of a stairway leading up on the outside between two tall buildings. A number of persons were assembled there wild with excitement and fear.

Reckless Ralph pushed boldly up the stairs, and at the top, true enough, he found the body of the man left there to guard the passage, lying dead, with the mark of Scarlet Death upon his temple. An execration burst from the outlaw's lips; then turning, he tried the door leading into the building on the right, and found it locked.

Descending the stairs, he ordered the body of the dead guard to be removed, and two others to take their post as watch at the head of the stairs.

A few minutes later the outlaw chief and his lieutenant were back in the court-room, and from his quarters, the Dumb Spy heard the following colloquy:

"Thoms, it does seem as though our days of glory were about over. It stands to reason from the recent death of Losh, that my daughter's imprisonment has been discovered."

"Like as any way there's some one lurking about to release her, and if it was my prisoner—*my* Dora Mobile—I'd place a guard on the inside of the room instead of the outside. Then, don't you see, a lurkin' foe couldn't slip up and knock him on the head, but would have to make his way into the room, and of course would make noise enough to put the guard in readiness to receive him."

"Well, really, Thoms, your idea of putting a guard on the inside of the room is a capital one; and I'll proceed to carry it into effect by placing Witless Seth there on guard. You see she can't converse with him, and with honeyed words and sweet smiles bribe him to release her; then his sense of feeling is so sensitive that a skulker couldn't touch the building without his feeling the vibratory shock, however slight. So I'll summon the mute and instruct him at once," said Reckless Ralph, and he proceeded to the spy's room.

He found Dick fast asleep, but rousing him, he conducted him into the court-room, and raising his hand, said:

"Seth, my daughter, who persists in running away from home, is a prisoner in one of the secret rooms. I mistrust enemies are lurking about, who will endeavor to liberate her to-night, and I want you to stand guard to prevent it."

The Dumb Spy at once announced his willingness to comply with the captain's request. So he was conducted to the two tall buildings where the victim of Scarlet Death had been found.

Ascending the stairs the robber-chief unlocked and opened one of the doors and entered the room, followed by the mute. The apartment was lighted with a tallow-dip, and Wild Dick ran his eyes hastily over the room, taking everything at a glance. And he could scarcely repress an exclamation when his eyes fell upon the figure of a woman, seated near a small window. She turned toward them as they entered, and the Dumb Spy saw at once that he stood face to face with the original of Captain Rossgrove's picture!

She was young and extremely handsome, with features of the Greek type, and a form of exquisite beauty. Her face was a little pale, and her eyes heavy and sad, for her spirit was almost crushed under her cruel imprisonment. A look of deep despondency clouded her face when she saw who her visitors were; and with a sigh she turned away, and gazed out of her barred window into the darkness.

The outlaw tarried only a few minutes, instructing the guard, then he left the room and locked the door behind him.

When his footstep descending the stairs had died away, the prisoner breathed an air of relief; but soon she buried her face in her hands and burst into tears, and wept and sobbed as though her heart was breaking. At length she grew calm and sunk into a sort of mental abstraction. Her thoughts must have turned upon her guard eventually, for they suddenly found expression in the involuntary exclamation:

"Oh, if this man could only speak!"

"I can, madam," said Dick, in a low whisper, causing the prisoner to start from her reverie and turn with surprise upon him.

"Did you speak?" she asked.

"I did, madam," Dick replied, "but speak low as possible, for they all think I'm as deaf as an adder and dumb as a wooden man; but, the fact of it is, I can hear as good as the best, and have mighty good use of my tongue. But now, madam, you're jist the very person I'm looking for."

"You—you looking for me?" exclaimed the woman, a ray of hope beaming in her dark eyes.

"Edzactly," responded the hunter. "I'm a spy here in this settlement in behalf of a lot of fellers called claim-stakers. Not many hours ago one of them showed me a plecter, and wanted me to find out whether the original was in this settlement as a prisoner, or free. You, madam, look orffully like that plecter."

"Who was the person that showed you the picture?" she asked.

"Captain John Rossgrove."

A low cry of joy burst from the woman's lips, and dropping on her knees before the spy, she said, imploringly:

"Oh, kind stranger, tell me where John Rossgrove, my darling husband, is?"

"Now I'll swear," said Dick, somewhat surprised. "this beats me—you, Captain Rossgrove's wife! Well, the captain's not fur from here, and if all goes right, you will be with him afore long."

"Thank God for this!" burst from the lips of Camilla Rossgrove, for she, this fair prisoner was. As she resumed her seat:

"Did John, my husband, tell you what reason he had to think I was in this place?"

"No, he would tell me nothing."

"When will you see him again?"

"I can't say, edzactly. It will be before twenty-four hours, though. But rest assured you will be rescued from here, before long. Keep on the lookout for help, and of all you do, know me, when others are about, only as Witless Seth, the Dumb Spy."

"I understand you, kind sir, and I will endeavor to observe your desire. When you see my husband, tell him of my situation."

"I will do that, Missus John. Ah! hark! silence!"

The Dumb Spy drew a pistol.

A hasty footstep was heard bounding up the steps without.

It proved to be one of the robbers on his way to his room.

They continued their conversation in low whispers until nearly midnight; then, at the earnest request of Wild Dick, Camilla retired to her bedroom and sought repose on the couch that had been prepared there for her.

Dick placed his chair against the door of the prison-room, and assuming a position of ease, went to sleep and slept till morning.

About sunrise he was dismissed from further service, as Camilla's guard, by Reckless Ralph. As soon as he had procured his breakfast, he wandered away westward into the woods, and as soon as he was out of sight of Spain, he bent his footsteps in the direction of Fort Defiance. Moving with all possible haste, he soon came in sight of the little post. He saw the flag floating lazily in the morning breeze, but not one of the defenders could be seen.

Carefully he crossed the opening and approached the fort. The gate was opened to admit him, and when he had made a general statement of the situ-

ation of affairs among the enemy, he took Captain Rossgrove aside and said:

"Captain, I've found your wife."

"My wife!" gasped the captain.

"Yes, captain; she's a prisoner at Spain. She war abducted and carried there by the robbers."

The captain groaned in spirit.

"Oh, God! I fear it will kill her!"

"No, danger, Cap. She's gittin' on all right. I guarded her last night, and we had a long talk."

"Then you told her I was near?"

"Yes; and it done me good to see her eyes sparkle and roses gather on her cheeks. I tell you, Cap, you *must* be proud of sich a handsome woman!"

"Oh, Heavens, Dick! If you only knew the agony I have suffered the last week, you would know how fondly I love my wife! And if you will effect her release you shall have your own reward."

"Tut, tut, Cap: the honors I'm reapin' as Witless Seth, the Dumb Spy, more than repay me for all I do. Then I'm goin' to make the information I possess of them outlaws' doin's pay me somethin'. However, I've got a plan laid for the rescue of your wife, if Old Hurricane will lend a helpin' hand."

"Then, Dick, I fear she will never be released, for I expect Hurricane is dead."

"Dead?" exclaimed the hunter. "Hurricane dead?"

Rossgrove briefly narrated the adventures of the previous night, and the sudden and fearful departure of Old Hurricane and Big-Foot on the back of the frightened horse.

"Whew!" exclaimed Dick, when the captain had concluded, "that war a ticklish situashun, but, if either of them comes out clear with a sound scalp, it'll be Old Hurricane, now mind."

"I hope so, Dick, if my wife's rescue depends on his assistance."

"A horseman! A horseman!"

The cry rung suddenly out from the lips of the sentinel. The attention of every one within the fort was at once directed to a horseman approaching across the plain from the woods, riding at a furious speed.

A shout of joy burst from the claim-stakers' lips, for, by this time, the horseman had come near enough for all to see that it was Old Hurricane. He was riding the identical horse upon which he and Big-Foot had been carried away, and the object that he was swinging above his head was an Indian's scalp!

One of the party hastened and opened the gate, and a minute later the hunter rode into the little fort, amid the wildest shouts of joy. His face was scarcely recognizable, it being bruised and swollen from many ugly wounds and blows.

"Ho, boys!" burst from his lips as he drew rein in the inclosure. "I see you and them girls are all safe and sound! And you must excuse me, friends, for my hasty departure last night. I war wanted across the plain yonder, and didn't take time to tell you whar I war goin'."

"Yes, Hurricane, we saw you and Big-Foot ride away in a hurry," said Dudley.

"Ho! ho! ho!" roared the old borderman; "wer'n't that a comical situation, tho'? I sw'ar I'd as lief be skulped as to support two hundred and fifty pounds by the ha'r of the head. But, boys, that ole score atwixt me and Big-Foot is settled. I warped it to the varlet, and thar is his scalp to testify to the fact."

"Hurricane," said Rossgrove, with an impatient gesture. "I would like to speak with you a moment."

"Sartainly, John, sartainly," replied the hunter, giving his animal into the care of Ransom Kendall.

The two stepped aside and conversed a few minutes in an undertone, then Wild Dick was called to them. The three conversed several minutes longer, then rejoined the rest of the party.

The next hour was passed in listening to Hurricane narrate his adventures with Big-Foot.

The maidens prepared the old hunter a sumptuous breakfast, of which he partook with a keen relish.

The day passed slowly, with no excitement of an unusual character.

As the shades of night began to gather, Wild Dick took his departure for Spain, accompanied by Old Hurricane.

Captain Rossgrove opened the gate for them, and, as they passed out, Dick said:

"Captain, when we return we will bring your wife with us."

"We will, John, by the shades of the old prophets," added Hurricane.

"May Heaven speed you, boys," responded the captain.

CHAPTER XVI.

"HIGH" TIMES AT SPAIN.

NIGHT had long since enveloped the land in darkness when the Dumb Spy and Old Hurricane drew near the outlaw village. Having approached as near as they dare without encountering some of the settlers, they came to a halt.

"I'll tell you, Hurricane," said Wild Dick, "suppose you remain right here while I run down and see what's up, and what our prospect is. If I'm locked up to guard Missus John, I'll give you a signal from the winder."

"All right, Dick, all right," replied the hunter.

Dick at once took his departure, and entered the village. He saw there was a light in the court-room, and gaining his own apartment in the rear, his ears were greeted by the sound of angry voices.

He discovered that a number of the leading spirits of Spain were assembled in council.

It appeared that their treasure cave had been discovered and robbed of some of its valuables; and that, during that day, Reckless Ralph and Thoms had been at the cave and had packed up a large box full of articles of great value, and during that night they intended to transfer them from the cave to the village.

For trusty confederates had been selected to bring them, and their wagon already stood in waiting at the door for the trip. One of the men had entered the court-room for instructions, which Reckless Ralph proceeded to give.

"Bring the large box," he said, "marked with an X cut on the upper side. This you will find very heavy. There are also two small boxes marked as the large one, which you will bring."

"Where are they to be delivered, or rather, deposited, captain?" asked one of the men.

"The two small ones will be placed in this room, and the large one in my daughter's prison-room, where her guard can also guard the box."

Without further talk the man left the room and joined his three friends in the wagon at the door, then they took their departure for the treasure-vault.

Gliding from his room, the Dumb Spy crept away to where Old Hurricane was concealed. In a few words he acquainted the hunter with what was going on among the outlaws, and after discussing the matter a few minutes, both turned and proceeded at a rapid pace toward the robbers' treasure-vault.

Something like two hours had passed when a footstep was heard in the mute's room, and a short time later a man came to the door and said:

"Captain, the boys have come with the boxes."

"Indeed? A quick trip they made" replied the robber-chief, and followed by Thoms, he went out to where the wagon was drawn up at the foot of the stairs leading up to the door of Camilla's room.

Reckless Ralph ordered the largest one removed from the vehicle and carried up-stairs.

This box was about four feet square, securely nailed up, and it was with great difficulty the men scrambled up the stairs with it, and deposited it in one corner of Camilla's room, after which the door was again locked.

Camilla sunk into a chair and burst into tears. She had lost all hope of escape.

She wept long and bitterly, wept until she fell into

a kind of mental stupor. But she was suddenly aroused from this mood of mind by a low, crashing noise in the room, and starting to her feet, she gazed upon the large treasure-box in the corner.

She starts, and a low cry of terror escapes her lips. She sees the top of the box being pressed slowly upward. The top is burst off. A human head, followed by a pair of broad, massive shoulders, appears to her view—leaps, with scarce an effort, from out the great box.

Camilla sunk speechless in her chair. She could not cry out, she could not speak, nor could she remove her transfixed gaze from the great, rough, bearded face before her.

The mysterious stranger saw at once the effect his presence had upon her, and in a low, husky tone, intended for a whisper, he said:

"Don't fear me, don't take on, lady; I'm here to save you—I'm Old Hurricane. I am."

There was something in the man's very words and looks that removed the chill of terror from Camilla's heart and mind.

"What other evidence," she gained composure to ask, "have you to give me of your being my friend?"

"Why, lady, I've no writings of any kind," replied our hero, "but, if I should just say John Rossgrove sent me here, would—"

"That is sufficient!" cried Camilla: "you are my friend; but your presence here in that box caused me to doubt you."

The old hunter smiled and replied:

"That was a ticklish situation, Missus John Rossgrove, for the knaves had me standin' on my head half the time, and it took a heap of nerve to keep an equilibrium. But all's well that ends well, they say. You no doubt wonder how I came in that box, so I'll tell you. Wild Dick, a friend of ours, Missus John, found out that the outlaws war goin' to bring that box into this room, filled with jewels and diamonds. So we hurried to their treasure cave, broke open the box and emptied out enough of the things to make room for my figure, and you may bet thar wer'n't many things left. Wal, I got into the box, and Dick nailed it up, and concealed all traces of our work. A few minutes later the outlaws came and packed me right straight from the cave to your room. I'm here to rescue you and take you to your John, who's not a hundred miles away; so if you have a hat and shawl, put them on, for the air is damp and chilly. That robber 'll soon be here, then, if you are not used to sights of violence, cover your eyes and refuse to listen."

Camilla, with a light heart, went to her bedroom, and, while she was getting ready for her departure with the hunter, the latter was busy in the other room preparing bonds for the robber chief.

A few minutes later footsteps were heard ascending the stairs.

"Be ready to leave the room, Missus John, the instant I throttle the villain. The Dumb Spy will meet you at the foot of the stairs and conduct you to a place of safety."

As he concluded, the old hunter sprung behind the door, where he would be at the robber's back when he entered.

The next moment Reckless Ralph strode into the room.

Camilla stood before him, prepared for departure.

"Heigh, ho!" exclaimed the villain; "you must be going."

The sentence was not finished for the next instant his throat was clutched within the rigid grasp of Old Hurricane's great iron fingers.

The villain gasped and struggled, but his efforts were as futile as an infant's would have been.

Camilla shot out at the door, ran down the stairs, at the foot of which she was met by the Dumb Spy, who made himself known, then conducted her hastily away northward. When they had gained a point of safety on the outskirts of the village, they stopped to wait for Old Hurricane.

They had not long to tarry. The old hunter soon came.

"It's a success, is it, Dick?" he asked.

"It is, so far as I know."

"Wal, I left that knave bound and gagged and locked in the room. He may and he may not get the use of his lungs inside of to-night, but, for fear, we will have to move with dispatch from here."

With Camilla at his side, the old hunter hurried away northward, while Wild Dick returned to Spain.

Knowing the inability of Camilla to journey on foot to the fort, Old Hurricane headed toward a certain point on the river, where the Dumb Spy had concealed a canoe for them.

They moved with as much haste as possible, and in less than an hour reached the river. The hunter found the canoe, and at once embarked with his fair charge up the stream, and, under his powerful strokes, the little craft went skimming like a bird over the water.

At last Old Hurricane announced to his fair charge the pleasing intelligence that they were but a few minutes' paddling from the fort.

Scarcely a moment later, his practiced ears caught the plash of paddles ahead of them, and, peering forward into the gloom, he discovered a canoe with several occupants descending the river.

Turning to Camilla, he said, in a tone devoid of uneasiness or fear:

"We'll be detained a moment, Missus John, but don't take on. We'll have to drop in shoreward, for thar's a canoe coming down the river, and it may contain enemies."

A sigh of regret escaped Camilla's lips as the hunter turned the canoe abruptly toward the west shore. A few strokes of the paddle sufficed to carry them close inshore, where the boat, with its occupants, was concealed in a dense fringe of reeds that grew along in the margin of the water.

The hunter bent his head and listened for the descending canoe. In a few moments the sharp prow of a canoe pressed into view and clove the water of the little glade.

There were three persons in it. They were white, and a single glance told the old borderman who they were: Captain John Rossgrove, Noisy Nat, and young Kendall, the Boy Ranger.

The presence of his three friends there at that time at once convinced Old Hurricane that all was not right; and he was in the act of making their presence known when Camilla, who had caught sight of her husband through the thin wall of the intervening reeds, uttered a cry of joy that could have been heard across the river.

"Love can't keep still; it's no use tryin'," muttered Old Hurricane, and dipping his paddle, he swung the canoe around into the opening.

The click of gun-locks accompanied the movement, but one word from Old Hurricane allayed all fears of danger.

Then there was a wild fluttering of two hearts, a low exclamation of joy welled from the lips of the husband and wife, and the next moment Rossgrove was in the hunter's canoe with his idolized Camilla folded to his breast.

Old Hurricane stepped from his canoe into that of his friends, and while the captain and his wife were clasped in each other's embrace, he asked:

"What are you fellers doin' hereaways, Ransom?"

"We are in pursuit of a mysterious canoe, which has hovered near the fort all the evening. But I guess they've given us the slip."

"Yes, guess they're half-way to Spain by this. I say, boys, let's make a move toward the fort, for the quicker we get there the better it'll be fur us, in my opinion."

The suggestion was at once acted upon, and after a short walk they were safely inside the fort.

Here Camilla was introduced to Dolly and Dora, and after partaking of a substantial supper they all retired.

When Captain Rossgrove found himself alone with his wife, he said:

"My dear Camilla, tell me now why it is that you were here in this country a prisoner in the hands of the outlaws?"

"I will tell you, John, all I know about it. It seems as though the outlaws knew of your departure from Columbus, for on the third day after you left, I received a letter purporting to come from one of your men—Harry Dudley. It stated that you had fallen violently ill, and were then lying at the point of death in a trading-post at the mouth of the Des Moines river, where you wanted me to hasten by the first boat. Never dreaming but it was all true, I took passage on the little steamer Fire-Fly, for the trading-post. During the passage I met an old acquaintance on the boat named Robert Raft, who introduced me to his daughter Madeline, and who seemed to exercise no little authority on the boat. However, on the second night of our passage, I was put under the influence of chloroform, from which I never recovered until I was locked in my prison in Spain!"

"The accursed devils, they shall pay for this!" Rossgrove fairly hissed.

"As soon as I recovered from the effects of the drug, and found where I was," continued Camilla, "I knew the letter was a forged one to entrap me. And since my captivity, I have learned from Raft himself that he is the notorious Reckless Ralph, leader of the river-pirates, and that the Fire-Fly is Raft's own boat, used by his gang under false colors, to assist in the piratical raids on the river commerce. Now, John, tell me what reason you had to suppose I was a prisoner in Spain, when you showed my picture to the hunter-spy?"

"I saw you in the arms of Raft, passing down the river in a canoe."

"And why did you not attempt my release, John?"

"Because I was a fool, Camilla, a stupid fool. Just before I saw you, I received an anonymous letter, through the hands of a mute, which informed me that you were false to me, and when I saw you lying in Raft's arms, your face upturned to his, as it is to mine now, I was fool enough to believe the letter."

"Oh, John! John!" she cried in agony of spirit, "you should never have doubted me!"

"I know it, dear Camilla, and I hope God will never permit me to be guilty of such a crime—yes, crime—again."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CANNON'S ROOM.

It is useless to attempt a description of the rage and anger into which Reckless Ralph was thrown in consequence of his rough usage by Old Hurricane. For fully an hour he lay upon the floor in total darkness, writhing in his bonds for freedom and gasping for breath, for the old hunter had tied a heavy bandage over his mouth. But, when the outlaw got the use of his lungs, his vociferous yells soon brought assistance.

The door of the room had to be burst open, Hurricane having locked it after him and carried off the key, and as Cale Thoms went thundering into the room, he said:

"Why, captain, what *does* this mean?"

"Mean?" roared Raft, in a fit of rage; "it means you are all a set of cursed louts to let an enemy sneak into the village under your very noses! Bring a light, one of you! That infernal Old Hurricane was concealed in this room when I entered, and he escaped with that woman!"

"Here's a light, we'll soon see!" shouted Thoms.

A cry burst from every lip when they caught sight of the jewel-box in the corner.

"*There!*" hissed the outlaw chief, throwing all the ferocious passion of his soul into the words: "there is the way in which he got into this room!"

"But how came he *in* the box, captain?" asked Thoms, "and who told Hurricane where the box was

to be deposited?—he couldn't have guessed it. It stands to reason, Judge, that that's a *traitor in camp*."

"Then it is one of the Moles," said Raft, "and see here, boys, the escape of that woman is going to give us trouble, for she knows enough to send every one of us to the State's prison for life. She has been taken to that so-called Fort Defiance, and so we must make preparations to kill or capture every devil of them."

"That's the right talk, captain," shouted those around him.

After some further conversation, the crowd dispersed, and soon all became quiet once more in Spain.

The following morning Reckless Ralph summoned the Dumb Spy to his room and instructed him as follows:

"Seth, my daughter was released last night by that big hunter called Hurricane. I suppose they went to the claim-stakers' fort. I want you to go there to-day and find out all that will be of value to us."

The Dumb Spy acknowledged his willingness to do his master's bidding, and in a short time he was moving northward. However, he did not go far in the direction taken, but turned eastward and struck the river about a mile from Spain. Hard by on the river lay a large scow, or flat-boat, that had been used as a ferry-boat, but which was now to be used for another purpose. It was about thirty feet long, and made like a canoe, being sharp at stem and stern, while the sides were high and flaring.

Near this ungainly craft the Dumb Spy concealed himself.

In a short time a pair of horses, hitched to a cart, came in view. They were driven by Reckless Ralph, and on the cart was mounted a small *brass howitzer*. This formidable implement of war was at once taken aboard the scow and placed near the center of the deck.

A second team, bringing a supply of ammunition and other things, soon made its appearance. Its contents were unloaded and conveyed aboard the craft, some of the ammunition being stowed away in the capacious hold. Among the principal articles, upon which the outlaws set great store, was the keg of rum.

Reckless Ralph superintended the outfitting of the gunboat, and by the time the sun stood on the meridian, he announced all in readiness for departure.

About twenty of the best men had been selected to man the boat, and, armed to the teeth, they went aboard. All seemed jubilant over some expected adventure and the keg of rum that had been left on deck.

By means of long poles or sweeps the robbers now pushed their battery out into the river, then turned and began their journey up the stream.

The Dumb Spy was soon on his way to Fort Defiance, after the departure of the boat.

He arrived at the fort in good time, and imparted his information. He remained in conference with his friends several hours, and when he finally took his departure, it was with a great and dangerous responsibility resting upon his shoulders.

After leaving the fort, he proceeded down the river and met the robbers on the boat.

He was at once taken aboard and questioned by Reckless Ralph.

"Is Old Hurricane at Fort Defiance?" he asked, in the silent language of the mute.

"Yes," the Dumb Spy replied.

"And my daughter, too?"

"Yes."

"How far is their fort from the river?"

"Just twenty steps."

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Raft, turning to his men, "we are all right, boys. By daylight to-morrow morning we will be ready to sweep Fort Defiance across the plain. By that time Thoms will have the Indians—the land forces—over along the bluffs to

cut off the retreat of the claim-stakers when driven from their fort by our cannon. Ha! ha! it will be a lively time, boys, but it won't take many rounds to knock that *pen* into a cocked hat."

The Dumb Spy was fortunately retained on board the boat and was assigned a post of duty. This was to deal out to each man his rations of cooked food that was stowed away in the hold, and also his mug of rum.

When darkness set in, the outlaws did not tie up their boat, but continued steadily on, and shortly after midnight the signal of their scout, who had been sent on ahead, announced their juxtaposition to Fort Defiance sufficient to bring their cannon to bear upon the little defense. So a halt was at once made, and the boat ran close inshore and tied up to await the coming of day.

"Boys," said Reckless Ralph, "it is three hours until daylight yet, and as we may have a hard day's work before us, we had better try and get a few hours' sleep and rest. One or two can be detailed as guards, and be relieved every hour. What say you, men?"

"Ay, ay!" was the general response.

"Then, for fear of the malaria in the river atmosphere, I'll have Witless Seth fill each a cup brimming full of rum."

When the "preventative" had been imbibed, a watch was detailed. It consisted of two men, one of whom was stationed on each end of the boat. The rest of the party now spread their blankets on the deck and laid down to sleep, the Dumb Spy being among them.

But in less than half an hour the latter raised to a sitting posture and gazed around him. The outlaws were all sound asleep. Thus he could tell by their heavy respirations.

The spy now arose to his feet, and, on tiptoe, moved to the north end of the boat, where he found the other guard leaning against the rum-keg, with the cup by his side; and he was sound asleep, too.

A smile of satisfaction passed over the face of the spy, as he turned and raised the rude "hatch" and gazed down into the hold. It was dark as pitch below, but, carefully sliding the hatch-door to one side, he turned, and taking something from his pocket, that emitted a dull, phosphorescent glow, laid it in the palm of his hand and held it above his head.

Five minutes later a figure, muffled from head to foot in a great blanket, came from the woods on the west shore and paused upon the bank. The Dumb Spy pointed to the opening in the deck; then the strange figure came aboard the boat, crossed the deck like a shadow, and hastily descended into the dark hold of the boat.

Again the Dumb Spy gave his signal, and repeated it, until a dozen or more of those mysterious shadows had come from the woods and sought concealment in the hold.

And all this time the robbers slept on.

The Dumb Spy replaced the hatch, and then laid down to watch and wait but not to sleep.

Thus the night wore away and morning dawned; however, the sun was nearly an hour high when the first robber awoke.

Then Reckless Ralph was aroused, and, when he saw what time it was, he cursed the stupidity of himself and his men for sleeping like logs.

The attention of the crew was drawn to the work before them. They could see the little fort of the claim-stakers standing boldly out on the plain, its flag waving proudly and defiantly in the morning air. A little column of smoke was drifting up from the interior of the fort, and the colossal figure of Old Hurricane could be seen standing on the rampart, leaning on his long rifle and regarding them with indifferent curiosity.

The fort was about four hundred yards away, and the outlaws had nothing to fear with this distance between them and the claim-stakers' rifles.

One of the party was sent ashore with a flag of

truce, and orders to demand the unconditional surrender of the fort.

Old Hurricane displayed his cap on the muzzle of his rifle as a counter-flag, and, when the robber had approached within hailing distance, the old hunter yelled out:

"What do you want here, mister?"

"I have come to demand the immediate and unconditional surrender of your fort and all within it," replied the robber.

"You don't say!" retorted Old Hurricane; "suppose we don't see fit to chalk up?"

"We will open fire on you with a twelve-pound cannon at once."

"Then, trot back and open. What's a twelve-pound cannon? Why, my ole rifle weighs more'n that."

"All right, old ignorance," replied the outlaw, and, turning, he retraced his footsteps to the boat and delivered the old hunter's reply to their demand.

"Just so," exclaimed Reckless Ralph, turning to the cannon, which was already sighted upon the fort. "I would just as lief it would be that way as any for we'll have the fun of demolishing the whole concern."

Old Hurricane had withdrawn from his exposed position on the rampart, much to the regret of Reckless Ralph, who now took the match from the hand of a comrade, and applied it to the touch-hole of the howitzer.

The next moment the sullen boom of the piece awoke the morning echoes for miles and miles.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TURNING THE TABLES.

For a moment a great cloud of smoke hung between the eyes of the robbers and Fort Defiance, but when it finally cleared away they saw that their first shot had not touched the enemy's defense. So the cannon was at once reloaded and carefully trained upon the fort. The second shot struck some of the upper timbers, shivering them into splinters.

A shout of triumph pealed from the outlaws' lips, and was answered from the throats of a hundred savages that were lying in ambush along the extremities of the plain.

Singular as it seemed to the outlaws, not one of the claim-stakers made himself visible, and, following up the advantage already gained, the cannon was kept playing with terrible effect upon the fort. A breach had been made in the south wall, that would enable a storming party to carry it with ease.

Still none of the claim-stakers had been seen, nor had Old Hurricane ventured to show himself again. But when several more shots had been fired, and the claim-stakers made no movement or show, Reckless Ralph began to suspect all was not right, and at last his suspicions found expression in the exclamation:

"Boys, we've been outwitted again! We've been firing, like a parcel of fools, upon a deserted fort. The claim-stakers have given us the slip!"

"Good Lord! It can't be possible!"

"It is possible, though—but see here; every man prepare to storm the fort. The enemy may be hiding away in holes like cones, frightened almost to death by our cannon's boom."

For the next minute there was a wild commotion on board the boat. Each man looked to the priming of his rifle, loosening his pistols and knives, and then went ashore."

"Forward, and no quarter to the men!" shouted Reckless Ralph.

At a full run they charged upon the fort. They reached it without an opposing shot. They swarmed in through the breach in the wall; they found the fort—DESERTED!

Every hole and corner within the work was searched for concealed foes, for the strange disappearance of Old Hurricane led them to believe there was some secret hiding-place about the fort.

But in this they were mistaken, as they found to

their sorrow, when a deep bass voice suddenly called out:

"Surrender, there! surrender, every mother's son of you, or, by the gods of Olympus, you'll be blown into the clouds! Surrender, you devils—surrender!"

The savages and outlaws started, sudden terror stamped upon their features.

Every eye was at once turned in the direction from whence the demand came, and to the dismay and horror of the outlaws, they saw Old Hurricane standing on the forward end of their scow, while, just behind him and near the cannon, stood Captain John Rossgrove, and just behind him stood his men, with rifles in hand.

Captain Rossgrove, being a capital artillerist, had trained the cannon on the fort, and now stood ready to apply the match.

Crazed with sudden rage, Reckless Ralph shouted to his men:

"Charge them—charge the devils!"

In a wild, crowding mass, the outlaws and savages went swarming out through the breach in the wall of the fort, and went charging like howling demons toward the boat.

The next instant a solid shot from the howitzer went plowing through the ranks of the advancing foe, causing them to recoil, turn and flee.

Reckless Ralph, Thoms and an Indian chief endeavored to rally the panic-stricken horde, but all in vain. Like frightened sheep they fled across the plain and sought shelter among the hills.

Thus the tables had been completely turned, and the outlaws and their allies gloriously defeated. As the reader has no doubt inferred, all was due to the stratagem of Wild Dick, who had drugged the rum that threw them into a deep sleep, then admitted the claim-stakers, one by one, into the hold of the boat.

Old Hurricane had made his exit and escape from the little fort by wading the creek to the river, then crawling under the river-bank to the boat.

The claim-stakers now moved the boat up the river to a point opposite the fort, and, having landed, they again took possession of their fortification. They proceeded forthwith to repair the damage done to the wall, and by sunset had it in a condition good as ever, and the captured howitzer mounted so that it could be turned in an instant in any direction that the foe might come.

But where were the women—Camilla, Dora and Dolly?

Before leaving the fort they had been conducted to a point of safety a few miles east of the river; and, as soon as darkness again set in, Harry Dudley, Ransom Kendall and Noisy Nat, were sent to conduct them back to the stronghold.

It was shortly after dark when the three men took their departure and crossed the river. They were compelled to feel their way with caution, for they knew not but that Indians were outlying about the fort to capture any small party or scout that might venture out.

They reached the women, however, without trouble, to find them safe, though almost distracted with fear, and anxiety, and after a short rest, they all started on their return to the fort, which they reached in safety.

CHAPTER XIX.

VACATING THE FORT.

At last our friends were all safe and defied the allied host that swarmed around them. Still, they left no point unguarded, and during the remainder of the night, sentinels were kept posted on the fort, and scouts sent out to patrol the valley.

The night passed away without any demonstration on the part of the foe. With the coming of day the besieged had hopes that the dense fog which had settled around the fort, would disperse, but in this they were disappointed. The white mist seemed to thicken instead of growing lighter, and this pro-

tracted gloom made it necessary for the claim-stakers to keep several men on duty as guards and scouts.

Shortly after daylight one of the latter discovered a canoe coming down the river with a single occupant. The craft was moving leisurely and standing boldly out in the middle of the river. As it drew near, our friends saw that the occupant was an Indian chief, and as he came still nearer he was recognized as the old chief, Black-Hawk.

As he gained a point opposite the fort, he headed his canoe toward the shore. Captain Ross-grove, seeing he was going to land, went out to meet him and conduct him into the fort.

All saw that the brow of the old chief was clouded, and that something of a serious nature was weighing heavily upon his mind. He had but little to say, and when he had received a cordial welcome from each of the little band, he turned to Captain Ross-grove, and said:

"Black-Hawk is troubled in his heart; a cloud is upon his brow like the cloud that is upon the face of the heavens."

"I am sorry to hear it, Black-Hawk," replied Ross-grove, "and would be glad if I could do anything for you."

"The pale-face captain can help me some," replied Black-Hawk.

"Then let your wants be known, chief."

"But a few suns ago," the old man began, "Black-Hawk gave the pale-faces permission to stake off claims on our Reserve. It has been the cause of much trouble, for many of my war-chiefs are made rebellious by the white man's fire-water, and they do not approve of my kindness to the pale-faces. Like brave men you have defended the rights I gave you to our Reserve, and many of my rebellious warriors have been slain, and the trouble is growing worse. While my war-chiefs and their braves did not approve of my giving you permission to locate claims, I could have overruled their objections; but the bad white men on the Dispute gave them fire-water that put the devil in their hearts, and all my eloquence can not drive it away."

"While Black-Hawk does not wish to withdraw the permission he gave the land-chainers, as a friend he would advise them to leave the Reserve before danger befalls them; and now is a good time to go. The Great Spirit has thrown a cloud over the land to conceal the land-chainers from the eyes of their enemies, and it will last full another sun."

"This is quite a surprise to us, Black-Hawk," said Ross-grove; "we have defied the power of our enemies and located our claims. But we have remained here since, only to show our enemies that we are not afraid of them."

"You have done well; but you are in a strange land, and your powder will not hold out with the patience of your enemies."

"True, chief, true," replied Ross-grove, "and we will be advised by you, for we know you mean us well. We will leave the country at once, to come again when the title of your land expires."

"It is well," said the chief, his face lighting up with a glow; "when the snow of another winter has passed and the flowers burst open anew, then the title of the Great Father at Washington begins, and his children can come without fear. But let them ever remember that Black-Hawk is their friend."

"We will never forget you, chief. You have been a friend to us in a trying moment, and if we ever return to this country to live, you will always be a welcome visitor to our firesides."

The old chief smiled in childlike innocence. He seemed highly pleased by the mark of respect shown him by the claim-stakers. Before he went away he was made the happy recipient of many valuable presents—a fine silver watch, a handsome rifle and a rich blanket.

After the departure of the chief a meeting was held, and it was unanimously decided that the party make no delay in getting out of the country.

It was decided to go by water. They would use the boat captured from the enemy. They could build a wall upon it to protect them from the rifle bullets, and they could mount the howitzer upon it for their defense.

The greatest trouble they would be likely to meet with, would be in passing Spain, for should the enemy get wind of their intention, as they probably would, they would run the risk of their lives to destroy the whole party of claim-stakers.

Old Hurricane, Noisy Nat, Wild Dick, and Witless Seth, also the Boy Ranger, had agreed to accompany the party to the Des Moines' confluence with the Mississippi, and so the arrangements for the retreat were bestowed upon Old Hurricane. The hunter accepted the trust with all the pride of a man who has had an army consigned to his care, and at once laid out his course for the retreat.

The band was to be divided into two parties—one party to take the boat down the river and around the great bend, while the other party was to take the ladies, and on foot, across the country and meet the boat below the bend if it made the trip past Spain.

The old hunter's plans meeting general approval, work was at once commenced on the float, and by dark all was ready for departure.

Those detailed to carry the craft around the bend took leave shortly after dark, and a few minutes later the other party, under Old Hurricane, crossed the river, and took its way in a southeasterly course through the woods. By his own request, Witless Seth was permitted to accompany this party.

As Black-Hawk had predicted, the fog still hung over the land, and this, together with the darkness, rendered the gloom almost impenetrable; and it was only by Harry Dudley, the young surveyor, consulting his compass occasionally, that they were enabled to proceed at all in the right direction.

The journey before them was a short one; yet, owing to the extreme darkness, it would require several hours, if not the entire night, to make the trip. However, they pressed on with good heart, and about midnight they emerged from the tangled woods into the open prairie. Here they were enabled to move with greater ease and speed, but they suddenly became aware of other persons being abroad upon that plain.

This discovery gave them great uneasiness. It gave rise to the fear that they were being followed by the Indians and outlaws, and should the fog clear away suddenly, as it was likely to do at any hour, escape would be impossible.

They stopped and listened. True enough, Indians were on the plain. But there was no alternative now but to keep on, and so they quickened their footsteps in hopes of reaching some place of security soon.

At times they could hear the swift "swish" of feet through the grass within a few paces of them, yet the deep gloom concealed both parties from each other's eyes.

At length, however, another discovery was made that caused our friends great uneasiness. A light could be seen bobbing about over the plain, and it finally became known to the fugitives that it was a lantern carried by no less a personage than the notorious Lieutenant Cale Thoms.

"Boys," whispered Old Hurricane, "that lantern is likely to cause us some trouble, and should it come hereaways, I shall endeavor to exterminate the thing."

They moved briskly, yet cautiously on. Witless Seth, the mute, followed close at their heels, and although no conversation could be had with him, it was observed that he was constantly on the alert for danger, often pointing out that which could be neither seen nor heard by his friends.

As they pressed on, several pairs of eyes were kept fixed upon the moving lantern, and at length it was seen to be making a circuit that would bring it near the fugitives. The latter made no efforts to elude it,

for they felt that it was of the greatest importance to them that it be destroyed as soon as possible.

The outlaw was alone, and was moving in a direction that would lead him directly across the path of, and not three paces from the hunted party.

Old Hurricane had decided upon his course of action. He would let the outlaw pass him, then strike him down from behind. But, to the sudden surprise and fears of all, the instant the outlaw got directly in front of them, he stopped, and turning with his face toward them, held up his lantern so that its rays fell full in their faces! It also lit up the broad, sensual face of the outlaw. Our friends saw his lips part as if to utter a call, but before he could give his cry, there was a sudden "whirr" through the air, and with a low moan, the robber sunk to the earth.

His lantern had fallen from his hand, and leaping forward, Old Hurricane grasped it. As he did so, its rays streamed across the face of the prostrate outlaw, and upon his temple he saw the death mark of Scarlet Death!

Dropping the lantern, as if through fear of its light showing the mysterious avenger where to strike him, he sprung back to his friends, and in a tone denoting great excitement, he said:

"By the gods of Olympus, friends, Scarlet Death is abroad, too! He slew that robber! Come, let's leave, for fear we get a spot. Leave the lantern to show the Indians the mark of the Avenger, and mebbe it'll skeer the varmints off!"

Rossgrove saw, as they followed on after the hunter, that he was not a little excited over the death of Thoms, and that he entertained superstitious fears of Scarlet Death. It also served to quicken the steps of all the party—Witless Seth, the poor unfortunate, creeping on behind, unconscious of what was being said.

The death of Thoms was soon discovered by his red allies, and a cry of dismay pealed from their lips. By this time, however, our friends were some distance away, and whether it was owing to the Demon's stroke or not, they met with no further difficulty during the night.

The night wore away quicker than they had wished for, for under its cover they had hoped to reach the river, which was still some distance away. Besides, the sun threatened to disperse the fog, for at times it would rise upward from the plain, leaving the whole expanse uncovered, but the next instant it would fall again, darker and denser than ever.

The party halted for a few minutes on the plain to rest and partake of the meager supply of refreshments prepared before leaving the fort.

Half an hour found them again in motion, and they had begun to congratulate themselves on their escape from the enemy's toils, when suddenly a current of air swept across the plain; the fog lifted from its bosom like a banner of ethereal lacework, and there, on a little eminence, not fifty paces from the weary whites, stood fully two-score of Indian warriors gazing directly at them!

CHAPTER XX.

DODGING THE DEATH HOUNDS.

"Oh, God, we are in the demons' toils!" cried Captain Rossgrove, at sight of the savages. "Friends, we are doomed—"

The rest of his words were drowned in a yell that pealed from two-score of savage throats, mingled with the crack of as many rifles, that cut the fog around them; and as the bullets, fired at random, whistled over the heads of our friends, they seemed to sweep away the current of air that had raised the fog, for almost at the same instant the mist settled down upon the plain, concealing the two parties from the eyes of each other.

"Come—come!" cried Old Hurricane, grasping Dolly by the hand and hurrying away in a course at right angles with the one they had been pursuing, closely followed by his friends.

This movement was unseen by the foe, who rushed wildly forward—passed the angle of the fugitives' course, and rushed on into the gloom, supposing they (the fugitives) had turned and fled away in the direction they had come.

The old hunter's dodge had proven a success: he had eluded the foe—for a time at least.

"Let's hurry on, friends, while we are clear of the varlets," said the Old Land Pilot; "they have noses keen on the trail as a hound, and if they once strike ours in the damp, trodden grass, they'll dog us to death."

"Yes, let us lose no time," added Rossgrove, "for this is our last chance for escape."

"Hark! hark!" cried the old hunter, gazing back over his shoulder like a stag at bay.

"What now, Hurricane?" asked Rossgrove.

"Ah me!" cried the old borderman; "the lopin' hounds have caught our trail in the damp grass! Forward, friends, for the river; the crisis is comin'!"

With a silence that told of deep inward fears, the fugitives quickened their footsteps into a run.

Not three hundred yards behind the foe could be heard.

To add to the fears of the fugitives they saw that the fog around them was growing lighter, and that a current of air was lifting it gradually upward from the plain.

"I am afraid it's all up with us, Hurricane," said Harry Dudley; "the fog is rising from the plain and—"

"Never say die, Harry, with that little angel at your side," replied Hurricane. "Let us trust to the God of battles for help. It's not my own scalp that I prize so dearly—I wouldn't run a thousand miles to save it—but these gentle ones is what's stirrin' me up."

"Ah, uncle Hurricane!" cried Dora, "you have risked every thing for us, and—"

"Ah! the fog is goin'!"

A current of air sucked across the plain at this juncture, rolling the fog up into the heavens, revealing the plain for miles and miles.

A glance backward showed the savages in wild pursuit. Before them, not over eighty rods away, rolled the Des Moines river.

"There it is—the river—right there!" cried Ransom Kendall.

"We will never reach it," cried Captain Rossgrove; "the savages will overhaul us before—"

He did not complete the sentence; a sullen boom burst upon the air, and at the same instant a cannon ball came screaming through the heavy air and plowed its way through the ranks of the pursuing redskins.

"Saved! saved! thank God!" cried Rossgrove, coming to a sudden halt.

"Yas. Let's take it cool, now, as a mountain top," added Old Hurricane; "the boys with the boat are at the app'inted place, and it's well they sent a leetle assistance hereaways, for the devils were pressing us hard. But they'll give us no further trouble—see, they've stopped and are huntin' up the pieces of their friends that cannon ball scattered over the plain. A good shot war that, and, sweet Moses! hear the boys on the boat a-yellin' for glory."

The little band moved on. The river was reached.

Then the boat was swung in toward the shore, and a plank was shoved out, the fugitives taken aboard, and the next moment all were homeward drifting.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MYSTERY OF THE DEMON.

"THANK God, we are out of the land of outlaws and savages—away from the scenes of Scarlet Death and his victims!"

Thus spoke Captain Rossgrove in a spirit of joy, as the boat resumed its downward course on the morning following the day of their embarkation.

During the first day Indians had been seen skulking along the shore, and our friends anticipated

some trouble, but they were happily disappointed and permitted to pass undisturbed.

Two men were kept constantly at the sweeps, being relieved every hour, and in this manner the boat was urged forward with considerable speed. However, it was a trip of considerable inactivity to friends, to be thus hampered and confined upon the boat. It is true many hours were spent in recounting their adventures in locating claims, and in listening to Old Hurricane and Noisy Nat "spin their yarns." And the daring adventures of the Dumb Spy in Spain, proved the most thrilling of all the stories, told in Wild Dick's most jocular vein.

"There is one thing," said Harry Dudley, during a lull in the general entertainments of story-telling and singing, "that I would have given a great deal to have had solved before we left Defiance, and that is the mystery connected with the Demon of the Des Moines."

"And here, too, Harry," responded Rossgrove.

"Boys," said Noisy Nat, "I see'd the Demon that night the Injuns got into the fort. I see'd it just as plain as a wink. I see'd its horns and cloven feet, and I see'd balls o' fire float outen its mouth, so I did."

"I think, Nat, you saw all that *after* the Indian struck you down."

"No, no," persisted Nat, "I'll sw'ar I see'd it before. It's no use talkin', boys, I see'd it!"

"Time'll solve the mystery properly," said Old Hurricane, as if anxious to dismiss the subject.

"Yes," replied Rossgrove; "perhaps we will hear more of Scarlet Death when we go back to settle our hard-earned claims, purchased with the lives of two of our comrades."

"Wal, you can't say, boys," said Wild Dick, "but that Scarlet Death has favored you some."

"True, Dick; he has favored us on more than one occasion, and that is what makes me all the more desirous of knowing who or what the Demon is," said Rossgrove. "But, not changing the subject, boys, I opine the best days of Reckless Ralph and his cut-throats are about over. I shall court the favor of the law just for the privilege of leading a party of dragoons to the extermination of a good portion of the Dispute, which will put an end to river-piracy above St. Louis at least."

"Hello, there! a settlement!" suddenly shouted one of the men.

All eyes were turned shoreward, and as the boat rounded an abrupt bend in the river, they saw a number of log cabins grouped together on the bluffs overlooking the stream.

"That's an old tradin'-post, boys," said Old Hurricane.

As they drew near the post, they saw three men come down the bluff and stop on the beach near where a small canoe was moored. One of them carried a traveling-bag.

The man with the traveling-bag stepped into the canoe before them, and taking up the paddle, headed directly toward the flat-boat.

As he approached, it was seen that he was dressed in a citizen's suit of black, and that he was a man of years, as his long, white hair and beard indicated.

The stranger hailed our friends and asked:

"May I inquire how far you are going down the river?"

"To the Mississippi, by this conveyance," replied Rossgrove.

"Are you loaded so that you would not take another passenger—myself?"

"If you desire to take passage with us, you can do so, although our accommodations are not of the best."

"Thank you," said the old man, kindly, and turning, he waved an adieu to those watching him on the shore, then ran alongside of the raft, and was assisted aboard of it.

"This is a decided streak of good-luck, falling in with you, gentlemen," said the old man, with apparent joy. "I live in Illinois, and have been on a visit

to my son, who is living at yonder trading-post. I was just starting home, and but for this streak of luck, getting in with you, I would have had to make the trip alone in a canoe. And now, if there is anythink I can do toward assisting along, let it be known, gentlemen."

"We have plenty of hands to run the boat, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Henry Farnsworth," said the stranger.

"Farnsworth?" repeated Rossgrove. "Well, Mr. Farnsworth, try and make yourself perfectly at ease. We are all trying to enjoy ourselves the best we can after a fortnight of dangers and trouble."

"A pleasure-party, I would judge from the presence of those bright faces yonder," said Farnsworth, waving his hand toward the ladies who were leaning over the side of the boat, gazing down into the water, and laughing and chatting merrily.

"We have been out on the Black-Hawk Reserve, staking out claims," said Rossgrove, "and by a combination of events, those ladies were thrown into our company."

"I was not aware of the whites being allowed to pre-empt land on the Black-Hawk Reserve, at least, not until after next May."

"We were fortunate enough to get a permit of Black-Hawk himself to select and stake out our claims, to be entered when the Indians' title expires, but it cost us a deal of fighting and trouble."

"I see you are prepared for fighting," said Mr. Farnsworth, with a significant glance at the howitzer.

"We took that from a nest of outlaws," said Rossgrove.

At this juncture Camilla joined her husband, who introduced her to the new passenger; as he did also a number of his companions.

The old gentleman now mingled with the party in general, though he had but little to say, being of a still, retiring disposition. The captain noticed, however, that he was a very close observer, examining everything about the boat very minutely. And when Wild Dick was addressed, in a jocular manner, as the Dumb Spy, it was observed that the stranger manifested more than ordinary curiosity; and at times his eyes were seen to be fixed, first upon Wild Dick, then upon his mute brother, Witless Seth, with a strange expression. To still add to the curiosity of the captain, he noticed that the eyes of Witless Seth followed the form of the stranger almost constantly, when his—the stranger's—face was turned.

However, he thought this might all come of nothing more than simple curiosity, and thought but little about it until Old Hurricane came up, and, plucking him aside, said:

"Captain, have you noticed how that old gentleman watches Wild Dick and Witless Seth, and how the latter dogs the steps of the stranger 'bout the boat?"

"I have remarked to myself about the fact, and came to the conclusion that if there was anything more than simple curiosity about it, some of the rest would notice it also. Here comes Noisy Nat; let's see what he has to offer."

"Talkin' privacy, boys?" asked the hunter, coming up. "Well, then, I'm o' the opinion thar's sum'-thin' goin' to happen aboard o' this boat. I never see'd a human bein' look so much like a tiger as that Witless Seth does sometimes, when that stranger's back is turned. See! look at him now!"

All turned, and were not a little surprised by what they saw. Henry Farnsworth stood leaning on the gunwale of the boat, gazing shoreward, in a kind of mental abstraction. Behind him, and a little to one side, stood the mute, Witless Seth, his eyes fixed upon the old man with a fearful gaze. His form was crouched like that of a tiger, one foot being placed in advance of the other, as if preparing to spring upon Farnsworth.

"By the gods of Olympus!" exclaimed Old Hurricane, he's goin' for the ole stranger—there, look!"

They saw a round ball drop from the sleeve of the

mute into his hand, then he drew back his arm and threw the ball with all his power at the head of the stranger.

A cry rent the air, and Henry Farnsworth staggered and fell heavily to the deck, a death-groan pealing from his lips.

"My God, the mute has murdered him!" cried Captain Rossgrove, springing to the fallen man's side.

But Witless Seth was there before him, and stooping, he tore a mass of false whiskers and hair from the face and head of the fallen man, and those who had known him gazed upon the face of Reckless Ralph, the outlaw captain!

The villain was just breathing his last, and a sudden cry of surprise burst from the claim-stakers' lips when Wild Dick turned the head of the outlaw, revealing to them the death-mark of Scarlet Death.

"By heaven!" cried Rossgrove, "the mystery is explained! Witless Seth, the mute, is Scarlet Death, the Demon of the Des Moines!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

For several minutes great consternation prevailed aboard the boat. The discoveries of Farnsworth being the outlaw chief, and Witless Seth, the mute, being the terrible Scarlet Death, had shocked the party with surprise and astonishment. But all finally became quieted down, and the boat moved on as usual.

Whatever the intentions of the disguised outlaw had been—and there was not a doubt but that they were the destruction of the party—they had been thwarted in due time.

Witless Seth no longer endeavored to keep his character as Scarlet Death a mystery or secret, for, with the death of Reckless Ralph, the oath of vengeance that made him an avenger was fulfilled.

His weapon consisted of nothing more than a solid, leaden ball, about an inch in diameter. This was securely attached to a strong cord connected with a wire, loosely coiled around his arm, and kept concealed from view by his large flowing shirt-sleeve, which was never confined at the wrist.

When he threw the ball the cord and coiled wire expanded fully a rod and a half, by holding the arm in an extended position after the ball left his hand. When the ball had expended its force, the elasticity of the cord and the spring of the wire would cause it to rebound instantly almost to the hand of the thrower, who could gather it up and conceal it within its receptacle in an instant.

It was a very simple contrivance, yet it had required a year of daily practice to become perfect in its use—unerring in aim and deadly in force. He had chosen the temple as being the most vital part of the person not protected by garments, and the strength and precision which he had acquired by constant practice made his aim sure and deadly.

The mystery of the cloven hoofs was also explained away by the mute. On the bottom of his feet he wore a pair of wooden sandals, cut in the form of a slender hoof. Over these he wore his moccasins, and, when it became necessary to keep up the mystery of the Demon by hoof-prints, he had only to remove his moccasins.

Through Wild Dick—from whom they had learned the above—they now learned this sad story:

After parting with his brother years before, Witless Seth wandered away and finally drifted into Spain. Here he met Reckless Ralph, who, he found, could speak the mutes' language. This was some in-

ducement for him to remain there, for he had found it very difficult in communicating with those that knew nothing of his language. Seth soon found out where Reckless Ralph had learned the sign language. The outlaw had a young and beautiful girl in his family that was deaf and dumb.

The mute at Spain had proved a very valuable help to Reckless Ralph as a spy. But, in the mean time, he had fallen in love with the mute girl. His affections were reciprocated, and the mute lovers spent many happy hours in each other's society.

Reckless Ralph saw what was up between them, and looked upon every moment spent by Seth in his sweetheart's society, as time lost to him, and to obtain the undivided attention of the mute spy, it soon became necessary to remove the girl where she could not be found.

She was sold to the Indians, and there slaved to death. Seth never saw her again, but learned what her fate had been through a robber who had taken such an interest in the mute as to learn the silent language.

When he had learned who were the outlaws instrumental in selling his sweetheart, Seth, in his intense madness, took a solemn oath to slay every one of the robbers, and every Indian he could get a chance at; and well had he fulfilled his vow of vengeance, and sustained his two characters—those of a friend, and yet an avenger to the same party.

And thus ended the mystery of Scarlet Death.

And now we have little more to write. The claim-stakers reached their homes in safety. Little Dolly was adopted by John and Camilla Rossgrove, who took her to their home in Columbus. Dora returned to friends in Illinois, but she soon became the happy bride of Harry Dudley.

When they reached the Mississippi the hunters all parted from the claim-stakers with feelings of regret. Old Hurricane shed tears when he came to bid Dora and Dolly farewell, and after their departure, he stood upon the bank leaning upon his rifle, watching them recede from view down the broad Mississippi.

Wild Dick, his brother Seth and Noisy Nat went away to the Northwest, while Old Hurricane and Ransom Kendall returned to their old trapping-ground North of Spain.

The following year, after Black-Hawk's title to the reserve had expired, the young Kentuckians all removed with their families to the territory, and took up the claims they had run so many dangers in selecting.

Through the instrumentality of Captain Rossgrove, Spain and the Dispute had been cleared of its outlaws, though for years afterward the air in and about the place was pregnant with evil.

Captain Rossgrove had been in the territory but a short time, when who should call at his cabin but Ransom Kendall. Dolly was there to meet him, and ever after that the young ranger was a frequent visitor at the captain's house, until Dolly became his wife. Then he gave up his nomadic life and became one of the settlers.

From Ransom, those whom we have known as claim-stakers, learned that Old Hurricane's true name was Wallace, and that he had removed his quarters to the far Southwest, where "times were more stirring."

Years after, Captain Rossgrove heard of the daring exploits of a great, bold-hearted hunter called Big-Foot Wallace, on the Texan Pampas, and he knew at once that he was the same brave and kind-hearted hunter he had known as Old Hurricane.

THE END

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